

Bungou Stray Dogs

Book 1 –Dazai Osamu’s Entrance Exam-

Author: Asagiri Kafka

Artist: Harukawa35

“After all, no matter how much you wish to, you can’t live off ideals!”

–Kunikida, Doppo. *Meat and Potatoes*, 1901.

Prologue

Translator: Kuririn

Editor: Janey

Just what is an “ideal”?

There are countless answers to that question. Based on pretext; based on ideology, there are numerous origins to defining that word.

But if you ask me, the answer is clear: It is a word written on the cover of my notebook.

My notebook is omnipotent.

It guides me as a principle, as a master, as a prophet. At times, it becomes a weapon and also a key.

Ideal.

In that notebook, everything about me is written out. The notebook that I bring with me everywhere I go holds all of my future.

From my menu for tonight’s dinner to my plans to move houses five years later.

From tomorrow’s business affairs to the cheapest radish in the area.

Schedules, plans, objectives and guides. I write everything in it and I carry it around to implement them.

In a way that would exaggerate – those “ideals” written out are my prophets. My ideals lies in those prophecies.

Everything would be alright if I just follow it.

As long as I obey the notebook, I can control the future.

Controlling the future.

What a wonderful phrase.

But –

No matter how wonderful that realization is, if you can’t see the bigger picture down the road, that brilliance is the same as an imitation; idealism is the same as nonsense.

Therefore, if you open the first page of this notebook, the knowledge to the shortcut to idealism is written there.

“Do the things you should do.”

My name is Kunikida Doppo.

As an idealist of truths, I am an advocate of chasing after ideals.

Me who wishes for the implementation of ideals, along with a certain new employee, who since birth had jumbled them out of order, surely this is some savage circumstance going on.

I flip the pages of my notebook and go through the following two or three days.

In that period of time, the important things that has to do with me are written out as below:

- *Takekoshi-kun comes over. We share a walk under the moon.*
- *I receive a call from the hacker, Taguchi, about the warship from overseas.*
- *I eat a pear: the pear was way too sweet.*

I am not allowed to find the trivial things troublesome.

That way I won't fall into untrue ways. Alas! What have I wished for other than this?

"Wait!"

I chased after the offender, dashing through the streets of Yokohama.

The crowd in the shopping street was as loud as always. The lively voices of stalls calling out to passersby, the noises of the people walking around the street, the customers haggling for a lower price, and the sound of cars unable to pass through coming from left and right. Even if a fight broke out on the right side, there's no mistaking that those on the other side won't notice.

I pushed through the hustle and bustle of the crowd, chasing after the criminal.

The man was a petty thief. He created an uproar in a jewelry store, robbing and then running away. It's nothing big, but it had already happened three times and when the store owners of the shopping street can't ignore it any longer, the request to capture the thief came.

We chased the petty thief after he ran away from the fourth crime scene. The opponent has light feet and his speed didn't drop at all. At the end of the shopping street, he ran into a narrow back alley and I lost sight of him. I stopped chasing him in the confusion and uproar.

"Don't be slow, new guy!"

I shouted to the colleague running behind me.

"Please wait a minute, Kunikida-kun. My shoelaces came undone."

"I don't care! Hurry up and come over!"

The one clumsily following me from behind, is a colleague of mine. A new employee that had only recently joined a few days ago.

His name is Dazai Osamu.

What a name one can do without.

"Aa, I am so tired. Kunikida-kun runs too fast. Slow down a little. It's bad for your health, you know."

"I get it already so just run, you lazybones! It's your fault that my stomach is in extremely poor health!"

"Congratulations!"

"Shut up!"

This man called Dazai, his competency is unclear, his past is also unclear, and he has zero motivation. He's always doing things in his own way and in his own pace and shreds my schedule to pieces.

To make matters worse, this person's hobby is –

"By the way, Kunikida-kun, that chap will run away."

My recollection was interrupted by Dazai's voice and when I turned towards the front, the runaway had swept the vegetables off the food stall and is currently turning left, disappearing down the street.

Without thinking, I clicked my tongue.

I recall the map of the area from my within my memories. The direction that person had run towards to is a fenced residential area. There are many hidden places and houses he can take refuge in.

"Look, Dazai! It's because you were dawdling that he managed to hide in such a troublesome place!"

"Isn't that great? It's just as planned. More importantly, I just discovered something awesome a while ago. Do you want to know?"

"Save it for later!"

"Truth be told, there's a book called *The Complete Suicide Manual* that's really rare. I've been looking for it all this time, and I found it displayed in front of an antique bookstore – Ah, we have to go back soon or else it'll be bought."

Without listening to me, he said it anyway.

"If you want to die that badly, should I just shoot you?" I yell at him and, he smiled, embarrassed. "Eh? Is it alright? Thanks." It's not even something to hold himself back about.

This guy doesn't even take his job seriously, and whether he's awake or asleep all he thinks about is suicide. To me, it is an unreachable world, but no matter how easy or how cheap the solution is, day and night, all he does is look for ways to get himself killed. In other words, he's a suicide maniac.

Suicide maniac?

What a repulsive word that is.

But, no matter how crazy this person's hobby is, or no matter how much I have to make him work, those are no reasons to fail in this arresting mission.

Because the words "failing a request" is not written anywhere in my notebook.

I resumed chasing after the culprit, turning a corner.

The road I had turned into is a dark and narrow lane. A back alley so narrow only one person at a time can pass through it. Both sides are covered with fences and the backyards and water wells of old houses can be seen. In front of their houses, laundry are fluttering in the wind.

With the smartphone at hand, I pulled up a map of the surroundings. On the screen, there is a marker telling us where we are along with the buildings and alleys around us. The alley runs along the residential area, and what's more, if the culprit keeps going straight, he will end up in a factory area with lots of warehouses lined up. If he manages to run that far, it would be impossible to find him with all the places he can hide in.

At the end other side of the road, the small silhouette of the runaway can be seen. Is his destination really the warehouse area?

"Damn it!"

The coarse language comes out. At this distance, it's going to be hard to catch up to him. If we fail to capture him here, he's going to continue his criminal ways. What to do?

"Well then, let's finish this up quickly and go buy that book. If we just interfere in his escape, that'll be good, right?"

Dazai laughed heartily.

He took a deep breath and with a resounding voice,
“Fire!” he shouted.

In front of the criminal’s escape route, panicked residents ran out into the street. A housewife carrying a pot lid, a half-asleep young man, an old man carrying a Shougi board. Surprised residents all ran out one after another, filling up the tiny street.

The criminal is now anxious.

His escape route is overflowing with people, he can’t go forward or turn back. Even when he threatened them, they were all too busy to look for the source of the fire to listen. His way back has been filled up with open wooden doors.

“How is it?”

“Stupid! The enemy certainly stopped, but we can’t move forward either!”

“Don’t worry, after all isn’t the competent detective, Kunikida Doppo, here with us? For that reason, I created the climax of the play especially for you, so please go wild.”

I am sewing that mouth shut later!

I opened my cherished notebook and nimbly wrote the characters.

I scribble ‘wire gun’ on the page and ripped it off, speaking to it, “Doppo Poetry –!”

Ability.

Just how can *such a thing* be carried out? It is impossible to explain this logically. Other than ‘It’s just the way it is,’ there’s no other way to explain it. Why does it have to be a page from a notebook? Why is it possible to defy physics and change its form into something else? There’s no one who can put a theory to it.

The ripped and spoken to scrap of paper, transformed into a wire gun following the words written on it.

I jumped onto the fence and point my wire gun at the criminal.

From my line of gaze, in order to threaten the people to stop blocking his escape route, he is in the middle of pulling out a gun from his breast pocket.

In such a rundown district, even a petty thief owns a handgun. The world must really be ending.

At any rate, I can’t let him shoot the gun in such a crowded place!

I took aim and pressed the trigger.

A hook flew out from the gun, aiming towards the target, the steel wire pulled taut.

The gun he was about to pull out was sent flying with the hook of my wire gun. And then it went through the sleeve of the criminal’s shirt before piercing the wall behind him.

“Jackpot.”

Dazai blew a poor whistle with his mouth.

I wind the wire back into the gun while kicking off the fence. Then I kicked off a hedge to move forward, flying over the heads of the residents and landing in front of the criminal’s eyes.

I raised my head at the same time the criminal draws out a knife from his pocket.

From this point blank range, he swings the knife downwards.

Such a move from an amateur, it won’t strike me.

I lightly turned my head sideways and dodge the blade. After that I softly press the criminal's elbow and wrist down. Then, twisting it and using the force of his downward swing, I knock his elbow the other way.

He flew in the air.

The criminal drew an arc in the air and fell upside down before his body slammed into the wall. He looked like he didn't understand what just happened and after falling down, he fainted.

Throwing the opponent while using the force of his body: this is the Up and Down Throw technique.

The dumbfounded and speechless residents looks back and forth between us and the criminal.

Dazai, who finally managed to catch up, called towards the residents.

"Hello everyone! Sorry I've created an uproar, everything's alright now. The fire was just a false alarm."

"Who... Who in the world are you guys?" A resident asks.

I took my detective license out of my pocket and to make sure everyone sees it, I raise it up high. Then I said, "There's no need to worry. We are from the Armed Detective Agency."

Chapter 1

Translator: Kuririn

Editor: Janey

8th

There was rainfall this morning.

A solemn and cold winter rain, as if the time for extreme coldness has come.

I wish to live according to ideals.

To conduct one's ideals, that's what I work for. Moving forward without fear, without losing interest, without hesitation.

Alas! To chase after the privilege of being able to dream about the future, will I be blessed to faithfully carry out my professional duties?

If you climb a slope near the harbor of Yokohama, there lies the office of the Armed Detective Agency.

It is a reddish-brown brick building. Because it is an old building and the sea breeze is strong, even the drains and telephone poles are rusting. But although the outwards appearance looks doubtful, it is actually solid, that, even when an enemy shoots at it with a machine gun, they won't be able to land a single damage inside.

Why am I able to confidently say this? It's because there was someone who had tried.

It's simply that the Armed Detective Agency houses only the fourth floor; other than that, the other floors have their respective tenants. The first floor is a coffee shop, the second floor is a law firm. The third floor is empty and the fifth floor is a storage room for miscellaneous things. Before payday, I am often indebted to the coffee shop. Whenever troublesome work comes, I would go down to the law firm and beg for help.

I am now getting on the elevator of said building, coming to work.

I get off the elevator and stood in front of the door to the Armed Detective Agency's office. Written with a brush, a simple *Armed Detective Agency* was framed and hung from the door.

I looked at my wristwatch. There's still 40 seconds left until I have to go to work at 8 am.

I have arrived a little too early.

Strict compliance to time is my motto. In the 40 seconds that I have to wait, I opened my notebook and confirmed today's schedule once more. I looked over the breakfast time once, the departure time from the dormitories once, the waiting time at the red light once, but because I've went through them once, I won't treat these schedules as dead.

While reading the notebook, work flickered across my mind. I fixed my collar and looked at my wristwatch again.

... Well then.

"Good morning."

I opened the door.

"Ah, Kunikida-kun, morning! Hey, please take a look at this! This is dreadful!"

Dazai suddenly appeared in front of the door. Smiling.

"After a long struggle, I finally did it! Oh, what a wonderful world this is! This is the world after death, the Underworld! It's just like I imagined it, look at it! Smokes are creeping along the ground, the moonlight stained glass feels familiar, in the western pink sky an elephant is dancing!"

He gestures in exaggeration and dances in front of the office door. What a nuisance.

"Hohohohoho, as expected the *The Complete Suicide Manual* is a masterpiece! Just by eating the mushrooms growing on the mountain trail behind, I am able to go down such a happy and pleasant road towards suicide! Wonderful! Hoho!"

Dazai's eyes are not focused. His pupils are twitching.

"P-Please do something, Kunikida-san!" An office worker looked at me with tearful eyes.

I presume, that even before business hours starts, he was already in this state.

I glance at Dazai's table.

Over there, lying open to a single page, lies the damned ancient book, *The Complete Suicide Manual*. The title of the page reads 'Death by Poison – Mushroom'. On the plate beside the book, there's a slice of bitten fungus.

What's more, if you pay attention a bit more carefully, there's a slight difference in color to the one drawn in the book.

"Hey, hey, Kunikida-kun, come on over to the Underworld too! Look, the alcohol are free flow, there's endless food, and you can smell the pretty ladies all you want!"

"Please help us, Kunikida-san! No matter what we do, he's still..."

Long story short, the one Dazai consumed was not a deathly poisoned mushroom, but one that must've caused hallucinations.

But, that's the thing.

Every morning, right after I come to work, he would mess up my scheduled order and scheduled actions. If I can't proceed with my morning plans smoothly in the first place, will I be able to proceed with the rest of the day smoothly? There's just no way.

Ignoring the twisting and wiggling Dazai and the close to crying employee, I headed towards my own desk.

I placed the bag on the table as usual. Then I turned on the computer. I opened the window as usual.

"Wow! Kunikida-kun, there's a gigantic sea anemone outside the window! Banana! It's eating a banana! It's taking away the white party blowers around us!"

As usual, I poured the coffee into my cup. I scrapped away the useless documents from the day before.

"I get it! I'll strip; if I strip the viewer's ratings will go up! It's not an easy task but let's strip, then as a change let's put on full body tights! Everyone wearing tights, going to the bank, then dance the Cossack Dance!"

I check the telegram in the correspondence cabinet as usual. I downed the coffee in one gulp.

"There's a voice... urgh, he- he's inside my head! ...A small gramps! And he's whispering to me, to go to Kyoto, there's an authentic tofu with a unique flavor that I have to tr----"

I landed a flying kick to the back of Dazai's head. He crashed to the wall and fainted.

From the start.

The day this person who definitely failed the exam with 0 points became my colleague was around 4 days ago.

“New employee?”

That day, I was organizing the work files for the day when I was called into the President’s office.

A new investigator got employed and he wanted me to look after him.

It was unexpected.

Even though working in the Armed Detective Agency is a dangerous job that involves killing and fighting, I’ve never heard of us being short on staff. In this way, I work as an algebra lecturer at a school as my side job twice a week.

Naturally, like the recent ‘Blue Flag Terrorism’ case, or the ‘Serial Disappearance of Yokohama’s Visitors’ case, or the conflict with the illegal organization of the Port Mafia, etc. the cases that requires the help of the Armed Detective Agency have been increasing lately. The requests coming in for our main investigator Ranpo-san will also increase, I am sure. I wonder if the President’s decision was because he already anticipated this.

“I’ll introduce you. Come in.”

After contemplating for a while, the President looks at the door and called out.

“How do you do?”

I look at the man walking in with a smile.

Sand-coloured coat and an open-collared shirt. He was tall and too thin, dark unkempt hair and unmaintained clothing; but despite the disheveled appearance, he had nice features. I was a bit bothered by the white bandages around his neck and wrists.

“Dazai Osamu. Aged 20, nice to meet you.”

20. Same as me.

“Kunikida, if there’s anything you don’t understand, ask me.”

“Ooh! Are you an investigator of the highly appraised Armed Detective Agency? I am impressed!”

The man who goes by the name of Dazai forcefully grasps my hand and shakes it. He swings it exaggeratedly.

At that moment, suddenly – I felt like a cold and sharp light flickered in that man’s eyes. No, it felt like it pierced to the depths of my mind, just like a monk above the clouds –

But in a blink, that saintly look disappears, and Dazai’s face returns to its normal stupid face.

Did I see wrongly? Was it a delusion of the eyes?

“Anyway, Dazai? Why this detective company? This is not some temple where you’ll be accepted if you just beg, you know.”

“About that. I was unemployed, unmotivated, and frequently drunk at a bar. At times I would talk with the uncle beside me and we placed a bet. Whoever wins the drinking contest shall be mediated into a job. I thought it was a joke, but then I won.”

Who the heck is that old man?

"Said person is the Department of Special Force's Taneda-sensei. Yesterday he came to greet us with a favour."

The President said with a serious look.

However, the moment Taneda-sensei's name was said, my breathing stopped.

If we're talking about the Ministry of Internal Affairs' Department of Special Force's Taneda, there's no one who doesn't know him in this line of business; he's the executive of the Special Force Unit. His work is managing and regulating all ability users. Even when the President was building the Armed Detective Agency, he often depended on Taneda-sensei's helpful influence.

No matter what a bigshot the President is, he can't turn down a person recommended personally by Taneda-sensei.

"I'll be under your care, senpai."

I don't know if he knows about the unrest in my heart or not, but our new employee showed his white teeth while smiling widely.

000

But, no matter if he's a super important person that was accepted by the leader of the Ministry of Internal Affairs or not, eating a mushroom and flying into a delusional world all on his own first thing in the morning is really annoying.

This is the third day I am partnered with Dazai.

My heart and soul can't rest for even a moment, work has not progressed even a bit, and calls of complaints keep coming in.

If I keep my eyes off him just for a second, he would jump into a river. When he says he wants to go for a break, he would end up drinking at a bar and come back all drunk. When he says he received a divine revelation, he would randomly go hit on a pretty lady. Calling him a 20-year-old child suits him really well, behaving as he pleases without caring for anyone else, he tore my plans into a thousand pieces.

Having said that, work is still work, a subordinate is still a subordinate. If I go against the President's instructions and raise my voice after only three days, starting with the President's trust, I would go against the Armed Detective Agency's dignity.

"How is he? The new guy?"

At a Go place near the Agency's office, the President asked while playing Go in a small tatami room.

"A disaster. He's like a hybrid of the devil, the poltergeist and the god of poverty in one."

I placed a black Go stone on the cypress Go board. The sound of the stone hitting the board resounds.

"But, well, I will do something about it."

After work, I would always play Go with the President at this place. Without anyone else around in this Japanese-styled room, sitting across each other beside the Go board.

"This isn't ending..."

The President placed a white stone on the board and gained the upper hand, leaving me in a dilemma over my right side of the board.

“No. There is Taneda-sensei’s case. But, why did Sensei placed such a man here?”

While talking, I look for a move to play. Maybe I should aim for a *kou* at the bottom right corner of the board – no, it will become a mountain of barrier for a *yosekou*. Even if I persevere on the left side, I can’t expand to the middle and it will end. I have no more moves. It looks like it’ll only take a few more moves from the President.

“Taneda-sensei may have a wild personality, but he has discerning eyes when judging people. He might’ve noticed an extraordinary ability in that young man.”

Certainly. As the rumours said about Taneda-sensei, he’s second to none when it comes to judgment. If not, he couldn’t have possibly commanded the Ministry of Internal Affairs’ Department of Special Force.

It’s just that – “extraordinary ability”? That guy whose head looks like it’s stuffed with mud?

“I agree with Taneda-sensei. When Dazai took the exam beforehand, he passed with full marks on the spot. That guy is a born winner. To the extent that it is doubtful.”

“What do you mean by... doubtful?”

“I looked up Dazai’s past in the office. However, there’s nothing. It’s completely blank. I asked for help from a friend in the police investigation team, but it is uncanny how nothing shows up. It’s as if there’s someone out there who deliberately erased his past.”

To think that even the police investigation team couldn’t find anything, it is certainly strange.

“Possibly, there’s simply nothing and he has just been idling around all this time?”

“Maybe. Otherwise –”

A few moments passed and a wrinkle showed up in the middle of his forehead, then the President continued.

“Have you asked Dazai about the ability he has?”

“No, not yet.”

Speaking of which, I’ve heard that he’s an ability user, but I’ve never had the chance to ask what it is.

“Dazai’s ability... is the ability to nullify abilities with a touch.”

I am doubting my own ears.

Nullifying. At a glance, it seems like a simple ability that doesn’t hold brilliance, but even among ability users, depending on how it’s used, it is an extraordinary ability that holds the possibility of shutting down other abilities.

My ability is called “Doppo Poetry”, it is an ability where if I write words on a page, tear it and pray silently, the real thing will appear physically. But, if I wrote it on a page larger than my notebook’s size, it won’t appear. It is a generic, superior and often criticized ability. But even so, it does not exceed “convenience”. If there’s something I need, I just have to carry my notebook around, but it is exactly because of that.

But Dazai’s ability is different.

Theoretically, it is expected that rivals cannot use their abilities because of Dazai. Even the world’s strongest ability user will end up being just an average guy in front of Dazai.

It’s not strange if many nations’ ability users’ organizations come together to scout him.

I’ve slowly started accepting what the President had just said.

“In other words... it’s something like this isn’t it? At the place where someone as great as Taneda-sensei goes to drink, a genius ability user just happened to sit beside him, and they just happened to make an agreement together. A man, who with queer words and actions took the exams and passed with full marks. That kind of person, just happened to be unemployed. Then by someone else’s connection, to the Armed Detective Agency that is very impossible to get employed in, he entered instantly without a hitch.

Isn’t that too good to be true?”

“It might just be overthinking. However, the Armed Detective Agency has many connections to the authority and the police. In this line of work, there might be times where we have to conform to state secrets.”

Certainly, if in the case of a criminal organization, this detective company that works together with the police, it is a profitable place to sneak into.

However – is it possible, that Dazai is a spy that sneaked into the Agency?

To the extent that he is able to outwit the outstanding Taneda-sensei?

That Dazai?

“Kunikida. I want to entrust that man’s entrance exam to you.”

I nod my head in agreement. The ‘entrance exam’ the President is talking about is an assessment that the Agency gave to investigators for generations. It’s just like a ‘secret inspection’. If you don’t pass this, you won’t be accepted as a true employee.

“At work, stay close to Dazai, make sure of the genuineness of his spirit. If there ever comes a time where you doubt him as a secret agent, emissary, spy or anything of the sort, fire him without hesitation. Also, more than anything else, if his soul is evil, if there is a time where he shows signs of wickedness –“

From behind the President, he took out a black automatic pistol from a bag he had prepared earlier and handed it over to me.

“...”

I accepted the gun without a word.

Heavy.

“You shoot.”

“Yes.”

If Dazai is implicated in any evil business, it is the role of the detective company to stop that at the coastline.

A person who holds a detective license from the Armed Detective Agency is granted the same authority as the police. With conditions attached, we have permission to carry guns or knives. We can withdraw information from the police. Above all, by the jurisdiction of the investigation, bothering and disturbing the search, falsification of police information, wiring and bugging of important facilities, every wrongdoing is possible. In the worst case, acting as a terrorist and destroying important buildings, taking away the lives of what hundreds and thousands of people, there are no such impossibilities.

The iron automatic pistol feels cold and silent in my hand.

At the bay where the waves softly crash, the moon soaks that figure with light.
I walk along the hustle and bustle of the harbor. The sound of the current rivals the noises of twilight, the moonlight rivals the lamps on the street.

Walking behind me, Dazai bobs along.

Dazai's mushroom turmoil had continued on for half the day, we can finally do some work.

"Kunikida-kun, that ability you displayed – was it called *Doppo Poetry*? Show me again sometime."

"I refuse. Abilities aren't something to be revealed lightly. And anyway, every time I use my ability, I lose a page of my notebook. This notebook is a limited edition product made by a certain craftsman, who after a long time, only managed to make 100 volumes and even the price is exceptional. As if it could be traded with your gags."

I look at the watch around my wrist and turned around.

"More importantly, Dazai, walk quicker. We are going to be late for our appointment."

"Even if you say we're late, Kunikida-kun, there's no appointed time to go to the information broker, so it wasn't really an appointment, isn't it?"

"No. I told them by phone 'around 7 pm'."

"And? It's exactly 7 right now. If we walk from here, it'll only take 5 minutes, so there's no way we can be late."

"Idiot! If it's 'around 7 pm', then I've set my watch from anywhere between 18:59:50 to 19:00:10, these 20 seconds were decided!"

"That kind of time-keeping, only you would do that though..."

I walked while bantering back and forth with Dazai.

By the way, because my wristwatch is synchronized with the standard time to which I get out of bed every morning, the miscalculation in time is less than 1 second.

"Who was it that ate a Happy Mushroom and caused work to not progress for the day? Don't even think to do that a second time. Even if you do, make sure it's the poisonous one you eat."

"Well, it was a happy hour."

"Are you already fine? Are you not seeing the elephant in the pink sky anymore?"

"Elephant? Don't be stupid. There's no way such a thing can fly, right? The one that can fly is the purple coloured paramecium."

This person is probably already hopeless.

Every time I speak to Dazai, I feel like my own doubts are sounding stupid.

Secret agent? Evil?

The worst thing he could do is probably jump into a railway and throw the train schedule out of order.

Be that as it may, Dazai is just your interesting average incompetent person who speaks simply, it's enough just to dismiss him. Although it's just as I wish –

"Dazai, you remember the request we are going to do from now on, right?"

"Exterminating the purple paramecium."

"...Until just now, I've been thinking that you're talking a bit vaguely, but you're doing it on purpose, right?"

"Ahaha. It's that right? *The Haunted House Investigation*."

I scowl when he said that without delay and with a smiling face.

Yesterday, I received a request addressed to me on my electronic mail. The content of the letter is as follows.

Dear Sir,

With respect to the Armed Detective Agency, we hope this letter finds you well.

During this opportunity, we would like to make a request to the Armed Detective Agency. We know it is a busy time, but please let us trouble you with this.

To tell the truth, it started with a bizarre phenomenon arising night after night. This is a request for an investigation. In a building that is supposedly not being used by anyone, we can hear eerie groaning voices and whispering sounds. What's more, there is a faint flickering light coming from the windows; those of us who live nearby have not a moment to relax.

Though we know that this is an ill-mannered request, but we appreciate if we could receive clarification on whether it is a work of mischief or not. And if it is, how it was carried out.

It is nothing more than a little, but we will send a special retaining fee. We will gladly accept the bill.

Furthermore, we wish for the contents of this request to be kept secret, while it is selfish, we request your cooperation.

We pray for everyone's health and happiness.

Yours Sincerely

Actually, it's very roundabout. Even though the content of the letter was beating around the bush, the point seems to be "There's suspicious noises coming from the nearby building, go check for us."

Right after this letter was delivered to me, said retaining fee arrived at the Agency's office. After checking the inside and deducting the expected expenses, there's enough for the retaining fee left.

If it's like this, there's no reason to reject. We will conduct the investigation as usual.

However – there's only one concern.

There is no name of the requester.

Who sent this request, where does this person live, is there any way to contact said person. Everything is unclear. Possibly, this person is purposefully hiding himself, but we can't report our findings either.

That's why I, accompanied by Dazai, end up with this difficult task of finding the unnamed person.

"Maybe the person who sent in the request is also an evil ghost waiting for us in the haunted house. And us, the detectives that fall into its trap, will be swallowed in one gulp –"

"You fool. As if there's a horror story where the ghost can send an e-mail in this world."

Though, even if the other party is a ghost I won't be scared... probably.

While we're talking about useless nonsense, we walk towards the warehouse district by the bay. The cluster of brownish red bricked buildings reflects the moonlight back into the dark and hazy night.

We tread into one of those warehouses that was smaller and older than the rest.

The ceiling is high, the plasters on the walls are peeling off from the sea wind. The smell of spare machine parts and oil, and also the smell of old dust and time are floating around. I pressed the buzzer to the office.

The sound of iron moving across the surface resounds and the chains lifted.

"Enter."

Sure enough, from the inside, a shrill voice replied.

Behind the many padlocks, I dive into the wide and heavy birch door and entered.

The room is a bit smaller than 20 tatami. On the walls and the floors, electronic machinery are piled up and flickering diodes illuminate the dim room.

The inner center has a clump of computers lined up, and the fans resound like the growls of stray dogs. On the table were four LCD panels, each showing a different picture glowing palely.

"Yo, glasses. Are you doing as the notebook tells you today too?"

"Don't take advantage of that cocky mouth, information broker. If we circulate that evidence we have in the agency to the right places, you'll end up living ten years in prison. If that happens your late father will cry."

"Don't be talkin 'bout my dad."

The information broker that has both his legs resting on top of the table is a 14 year old boy. Large eyes and cropped head. Whether it is summer or winter, his only choice of clothing is a white sweater. His body might be small, but the glint in his eyes are as sharp as glass fragments.

"More importantly, you're actually late? How unusual. What, on a date?" He raised his pinky, indicating homosexuality.

"Absolutely not. Dating is only reserved for the girl I am planning to marry. What's more, in my notebook, the page about my future plans wrote that marriage is in 6 more years." I said while flipping my notebook open.

"What's that, glasses? You have a girl you are planning to marry?"

"That is scheduled to happen in 4 more years."

"Oh, I see..."

The boy's eyes widens and his jaw falls when I answer him seriously while turning open my notebook.

"Living off ideals and plans, that's what being an adult is. Watch and learn, young man."

"Hmm.... I kinda more or less understand Kunikida-kun's character, but just now was a bit..."

Dazai appeared from the wooden door behind me.

"Hm, a new face. Who?"

"Hi. Introducing myself is obviously not a bad thing to do, but because of the thing Kunikida-kun is going to say next, it's impossible."

"Boy, before you ask for someone else's name, you should give your own first. And Dazai, don't anticipate my words and actions without my permission."

"Glasses, you really like the word 'should' don't you... Oh well. My name is Taguchi Rokuzo. 14 years old. My profession is computer hacking."

"He was caught hacking into the agency's network. An idiot that was hurled away by me." I politely commented.

"Enough with that talk. Hey, stop fooling around and hand over the transmission record from that time."

Three months ago, this Rokuzo brat hacked into the Armed Detective Agency's information database, there was such a time when the agency fell into such mayhem. Naturally, there's no way the agency lets their guard down when it comes to cyber defense. The mayhem was settled quickly and a tracing investigation pinned this location.

In the end, this Rokuzo brat screwed up big time, his proof of being a criminal, the transmission record, wasn't handed to the police and he should've accepted it as a condition for him helping out the agency as an information broker in a win-win situation.

"Well, and? Did you find out who the sender of that e-mail was?"

"The way you talk to your work partners is rude, glasses. There's no way I can do it immediately. Wait a little bit more."

Just like the boy said, he was entrusted with the job of locating this person without a name. Tracking the source of an e-mail is his special skill, so it shouldn't be such a difficult case.

"Even without this, I am already busy with the other case – 'tracing the missing person'. That one came first, right?"

"That's right." I consented.

– *Serial Disappearance of Yokohama's Visitors.*

A disappearance case where the victims who have no connections to each other at a glance unexpectedly disappeared and didn't return after. The current number of people missing is 11.

It's been a month since the investigation team started. The common feature between the victims is very minor, other than the fact that these people are from outside Yokohama and they were walking on their own two feet when they disappeared, there's nothing else. It's a searching-a-needle-in-a-haystack level of difficulty to solve.

Rokuzo's assigned job is to make a log about what the victims were doing right before they disappeared. He was requested to start searching from railway and taxi reports, but it seems like the course of events was not favourable.

"What is that case? This is the first time I heard of it. Tell me in detail."

Dazai was sticking his nose in, showing signs of interest.

"I'll tell you later."

For all that, I lightly denied the topic at hand.

Of course there was a reason for it. I had planned to set the solving of this serial disappearances case aside for Dazai's entrance exam.

"Hmm, educating new recruits. Glasses, you've promoted huh."

"He's a pretty obstinate superior; I am troubled, you know."

– Ah, that's right, Rokuzo was it? You're a hacker, right? Don't you have something, like Kunikida's weakness, or something like his embarrassing hidden photos...?"

"Oi, Dazai! Don't openly look for blackmail in front of the person!"

"Oh, so you understand, new employee. 1000 yen, 10000 yen, 100000 yen, which deal is good for you?"

"You have such a thing!?"

Wait, wait wait. Calm down.

"Don't fool around, I don't have a weakness. The brat is just putting on airs, Dazai, don't play along."

"...Hmm." Dazai looked at me with a gaze full of hidden meanings.

"If you don't believe me, then whatever. I only sell to customers who believed in me anyway. However, if glasses here pays for everything, I can erase all of the evidence for you."

"Who would pay!? I don't have such embarrassing information about me! We are going, Dazai!"

I pulled at the nape of Dazai's neck and stepped out of the wooden door, leaving the boy's room behind me.

...111000 yen huh...

000

Editor's note:

20 tatami: tatami are floor panels with sizes carrying a standard 2:1 ratio in its length and width. To avoid going into detail, just think of 20 tatami is as large as about 20 Kunikidas lying down, or, more or less 32 square meters!

At night, not a single person can be seen in the warehouse district.

On the streets of this district, Dazai and I were waiting for the taxi we had reserved earlier.

The lamps of oncoming and going railroad cars pulls elongating rays of light. Yellow-coloured shadows. Like silver ribbons. Diffusing red lights of brake lamps. The white headlights cut out the shadows of the buildings. The nightlights reflected on the cars' glass windows were like liquid, flowing into the distance in front of one's eyes.

The sea wind blows the clouds back and forth, the moonlight dropping black and white shadows on the harbour's road.

"What a pleasant kid." Dazai said while staring at the night sky.

"Letting the kid meet you was a failure on my part. I should've realized that nothing good will come out of it earlier."

"Senpai, can I ask one question?"

"What?"

"Why are you looking after Rokuzo?"

When I look at Dazai, he has a serious expression.

"I was wondering why you gave him a job. Things like going after missing people, I am sure even the agency can do that much. Even this instance, a conversation than can be done over the phone, you even go out of your way to get here."

I kept quiet. It's not an easy question to answer.

"It appeared just a little in the conversation, but does it have to do with the kid's father?"

I instantly looked at Dazai.

"So I got it right." Dazai looked at my face and laughed.

"...Rokuzo's father is an excellent policeman. However, he's dead."

Seeing no way out, I begin talking.

"Before, he worked together with the agency in pursuit of a criminal. Some kind of big shot criminal that destroyed facilities that belongs to the country and corporate businesses. No matter how frantically the police chase him down, it's like they couldn't get a firm grasp on his whereabouts."

"And that – is the *Blue Flag Terrorism* case?"

"That's right."

The police and the army were involved, it was a heinous case that shook the country into an uproar.

“At the end of the agency’s pursuit, we were able to succeed in discovering his secret base and reported it to the city police.”

“Well, isn’t that a great accomplishment!” Dazai admires.

“Yes, it certainly was. However, at the time, the army, the public welfare office and the city police were working together, the chain of commands got mixed up and created confusion. Unfortunately, the criminal was able to sense danger because of this and barricaded himself in the secret base. He was carrying a lot of high-level explosives.”

The memories come back. The angry roar of the city police from the telephone receiver. Order to arrest. Order to wait. The inconsistent instructions flying about.

“Because of the confusion in instructions, the only detectives that were able to rush towards the location quickly were a mere 5 people. The instructions given to them were breaking in and taking control... But in this kind of society, what can the criminal called the ‘Blue King’ who doesn’t have a part in any special organizations or hold any ability do to 5 people?”

However, the people in the location couldn’t understand everything. They thought there was no other way but to break in from above.

“The result was them driving the criminal to light the explosives. The criminal and the five detectives all died.”

“ –And one of those five men who died was Rokuzo’s father, right?”

“Rozuko’s mother died early and the two of them lived together. He said he had respected his father who was a police officer.”

I clenched my fist.

“At the time, the one who reported the discovery of the secret base, was me.”

At that time, if only I contacted someone with more authority. Or perhaps, if the agency had helped with the break-in.

“It’s as if I was the one who did the murder.”

“That’s not true. No matter how much I think about it, the head of the city police who gave the instructions and the criminal who blasted himself to death was at fault.”

“Maybe. But I am sure the young boy’s opinion begs to differ. Or else he wouldn’t have hacked into the agency in a revenge-like attack.”

Perhaps Rokuzo is bitter towards the agency. I’ve never confirmed it face to face. However–

“Rokuzo’s father is no longer around. Only that is the truth. Someone must watch over him in place of his father, and occasionally discipline him. I just happen to be able to do that. That being the case, the timing is convenient.”

“Kunikida-kun is a romanticist, huh.” Dazai let out a sigh similar to sarcasm.

I’ve never thought of myself as a romanticist, nor do I understand whatever this romance thing is.

However, all my acquaintances tells me, “You’re a romanticist.” I do not understand the reason why.

Even though I keep saying that everything in this world does not follow ideals.

As I think, a taxi stopped in front of us. The driver is waving his hand.

000

Concerning taxi drivers, there are those endowed with a variety of different experiences and knowledge.

Such as being clean, being steady, knowing all kinds of alleyway shortcuts, having the driving skills for being a driver for way too long, or a good young man with a refreshing smile, or those putting the passenger’s will to economize on the meter fare first. There are those that treat each request sensibly, not once interrupting.

Speaking of which, the request I made to this driver is only one.

“Well – it has been a long time, hasn’t it, Inspector Kunikida? Today is a perfect day for detective duties isn’t it? Today’s glasses also suits you well, as I continue my driving work, I became well versed in understanding the merits and demerits of glasses, y’know! Calling it elegance, or calling it the good quality of birth. Inspector Kunikida’s glasses is really excellent! You have my word!”

“I am begging you please shut up a little and drive.”

First and foremost, what does he mean by judging the virtue of the birth of glasses. How stupid – Although I want to know a little bit more about it.

“‘There’s nothing better than a quiet driver’. Have passengers not told you before?”

“Nope, I’ve never been told that, huh. Rather, passengers never talk when I am driving. It’s only me who does all the talking.”

I know what this taxi should be called around town. A deadfall.

Dazai and I rode the taxi we contacted before and headed towards the location of the request. In the darkness that can be seen outside the car window, the illumination in the city streets is little to none, the sparse outline of the forest sweeps the cloudy moonlight and flow it over to the rear.

Of course, we didn't ride this deadfall of a taxi because we were out of luck. We even purposefully send for it. Why so?

It's to gather information.

"Dazai, do you remember the *Serial Disappearance of Yokohama's Visitors* case that we talked about a while ago?"

"Ah, the one that Rozuko boy was investigating?"

"Yes. There are eleven victims. Out of those eleven, two of them were witnessed by this driver right before they disappeared."

I pointed to the petite driver in front of me.

"Rather than witness, I only drove them from the harbor to the hotel though. One of them was a lady on holiday, the other one was a businessman on a business trip."

"And you're sure they are the people in these photos?"

I took out several sheets of photos from my breast pocket. Either way, we already confirmed with the hotel's surveillance camera, these are the photos of the missing people. The figure of them walking into the building, checking in at the reception and walk out the next day; there were three kinds.

"Yeap, these are the people without a doubt. Even their clothes are the same as the ones in the pictures. I dropped them off at this hotel."

"Okay, anyway Kunikida-kun, do you think you can kindly tell me about the case in detail when you are free?"

"...Fine."

At that place, I begin to roughly describe the case.

About a month ago, a 42 year old man on a business trip to Yokohama suddenly disappeared. After tracing his footsteps, it became clear that he went to the hotel from the harbor and checked in, spent the night then went out to the city the next day. However, he didn't show up at the business meeting, nor did he return back home. Leaving his things in the hotel room, there's no telling where his feet guided him to.

The other victims were more or less in the same situation, lone tourists, exhibition participants, and totals to eleven people. Among the missing, they don't have the same ages, addresses or jobs, only the fact that they came alone to Yokohama is their common point. The police set up investigations to track their footsteps down after they left the hotel, but they came up with nothing. It's as if they disappeared in a puff of a smoke.

According to the city police, the most possible case is kidnapping. But, in a big city like this, there's no place where someone can be kidnapped without anyone witnessing. Also, the families were not threatened with ransom, the objective for kidnapping is unclear.

"If it is objective, isn't there one?"

The quiet Dazai who has been listening up until now, suddenly said that with a clear voice.

"It's *trafficking*."

"What?"

"I've been saying, after kidnapping, they were sold. From what I hear, the missing people are all healthy adults, right? Heart, kidney, cornea, lung, liver, pancreas, bone marrow – well, if they were sold in the overseas market with Japanese yen it won't amount to much, but the body of eleven people is like a mountain of gold already. If it's the doing of a lone criminal, it would be a fortune."

"Certainly, the black market have that kind of money circulating – but you know an awful lot about it."

I thought that for the average person, that kind of knowledge only comes from stories in books and films at most.

"No way, in a bar at the outskirts of the city, I just happened to hear people talk about it."

What a dubious explanation. It's like he's making an excuse.

Well, everything about this man is dubious.

"...If that's the case, then does the missing people personally beg their buyer, "Please buy my organs?" like that? Purposefully in the middle of a holiday or a business trip?"

"That's true, it is a little bit unnatural. Well if it's like that, maybe it's not organs trafficking, but because of some circumstances they wanted to disappear. And so they asked a professional service to get a new name and family register and bam! They disappeared. Something like that."

"Even so, if they went to meet these professionals on their own will, then shouldn't they be seen or at least have some kind of security footage about them left behind?"

"Among these pros there's at least one that's a master at disguising, right?"

"Come to think of it, I've heard of it, like in the photography industry, there are skills to make a man look exactly like a woman. By whatever means, stuffing the inner part of the cheeks with silk wadding to change the contour of the face, then –"

"No one's listening to you." I promptly interrupted the driver's speech that seems to be developing into a long story.

“Ah, I got it! Look at this picture, the two of them are wearing glasses, right? I found their common point! In other words, this is the *Serial Disappearance of Glasses* case!”

I look at the photos. Certain the victims in the pictures are both wearing glasses. Black-rimmed and silver-rimmed.

“Well then, Kunikida-kun, it’s your turn!”

“What turn? Among the other nine victims, there were those that were not wearing glasses. You can’t call it a common point.”

From what I can recall, among the nine, four wore glasses, two wore sunglasses and the other three did not wear anything.

“Tsk.... Then there’s no other choice, the other way is for Kunikida-kun to be a decoy. The criminal’s targets are travelers, right? Then Kunikida-kun will wear rubber boots, a backpack, red and green checkered shirt and mountain climbing pants and walk around the streets of Yokohama. Then take pictures of pedestrians with a gigantic camera from one side and ends sentences with ‘zura’.”

“Who would do that!?”

“Who would do that zura!?”

“As if such a thing could be called a tactic! Dismissed!”

“Dismissed zura!”

“Don’t wait for it to happen!”

“Ehh? Then let’s have a naked Kunikida-kun in a silk hat while dashing around the streets in a unicycle, shouting out the type of girl he likes.”

“You changed the objective!”

“Well then, how about Inspector Kunikida in a clown outfit, reading?”

“And you, shut up!”

Damn it, every last one of them!

My anger is slowly rising.

“Dazai! Work a little bit more with earnest! When will you start working seriously!?”

“Ehh? I am always working seriously though.”

If that’s the case, all the more reason for it to be bad.

“Fine, then how about we do this? I promise to be an upright detective soon. I will seriously conduct investigations, inspections, and reasoning. The superior Kunikida-kun will be tongue-tied, and, starting tomorrow, will be able to trust me to work alone without any problems. I will become that kind of excellent man you’ve been thinking of.”

Dazai rattled on a justification, but I can't trust him at all.

"Just what time is this 'soon'?"

"Once we get off this taxi."

Oh.

"For real?"

"Of course. An advocate of suicide does not back down on his words... And in exchange, I want to have something in return."

See, I know this will happen.

"What is it? If it's a salary raise or be given an easier job, I refuse, alright?"

"It's nothing big like that. It's just that, since just now, there's something I've taken interest in."

Dazai stared steadily towards the driver. Curiosity glimmered in his eyes.

"...Let me drive."

“GYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!”

“WHOOHAHHHAHAHAHAHAHA! I AM THE WIND!”

“WA-, DAZAI, STOP, PLEASE, AAAAAAAAAAAAAARRGGHHHH!”

“WOOOHOOOOOOOOOO!”

“OOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO”

000

“Well then, we’ve arrived in one piece!”

“I won’t ever..... let you drive again.....”

The doors opened and Dazai dashing out of the taxi while I almost tumbled out. The taxi driver ended up fainting in the passenger’s seat. He’s probably out cold for the night.

“Hm, you got motion sickness? How unsightly.”

At Dazai’s words, I lightly remembered my urge to kill.

This can’t even be called motion sickness anymore. I stand up, my legs shaking. My sense of balance gone. Just like a newborn deer that just learned to stand up, both arms and legs shaking.

Even the strictest martial arts training is not as exhausting as this.

“Now then, let’s get to work immediately! Because you’ve promised them earlier, let’s do this quickly!”

Since that lecture a while ago, I find it hard to say, “Let me rest!”

“The place mentioned in the request is just right over there, correct? ...By the way, Kunikida-kun, are you alright with ghosts and demons and the sort?”

“Ghost.....? As if I could work with the Armed Detective Agency if I am afraid of such things. More than the supernatural, it’s obvious that blades and firearms pose a greater menace.”

“That’s a good thing to hear. At any rate, the place we’re investigating this time is of that kind.”

My eyes moved to where Dazai was pointing at.

Standing still in the recesses of the mountains, a crumbling black building can be seen.

Coloured by the darkness, with signs of death and decay thick in the air, it is an abandoned hospital.

000

Why?

Why are we holding an investigation like this in the middle of the night?

While a person lives, there comes a time when they fall ill. A perfect mentality and body without sickness does not exist. With that as proof, everyone dies in the hospital we are born in. A hospital is just like this world and the next, a boundary between the world of the living and the world of the dead.

Giving way for this abandoned hospital to crumble to dust makes it all the more eerie. The moonlight creeps in from the broken window, casting a ghastly blue shadow on the wreckage, the sluggish pool of water on the floor is a lifeless purple. The spider lilies growing on the front lawn is a venomous red.

“Dark... I can’t see a thing.”

“Isn’t that just a good feeling?”

Walking next to my shuffling feet in the hallways of the abandoned hospital, Dazai overtook me with light steps.

The walls are decomposing, the wires are dangling off the crumbling ceiling. The window sills are disconnected, furnishings and equipment are mostly stolen, and the hospital rooms are reduced to housing worms and insects.

Just who in the world would take a liking to a ruin like this and even break into it.

“The wish of the client is to clarify the true identity of the sounds and light that happens here every night. I don’t know what will appear. Be on your guard.”

“Um.... Of course I understand, but Kunikida-kun, aren’t you a bit too cautious?”

I glared at Dazai.

“What are you saying? To one-sidedly underestimate the enemy is a fool’s barbarism. Just know that to assume the worst and move accordingly is what makes you worthy of being a member of the agency.”

I discreetly cautioned, I stayed closer to the ground in preparation for an unforeseen attack and advanced through the hallway.

“Are you perhaps... scared?”

“I-I-I-I am not scared! Idiot!”

“Then let’s go quickly.”

“Fool, in these sorts of movies, the characters always get carried away and do reckless things, so go ahead and be the scapegoat.”

“What do you mean by ‘these sorts of movies’?”

“Never mind that, just go ahead. I will keep watch from the back.”

“You just don’t want to walk in front... Oh, that’s right, because it is dark it’s no good, how about using a lighter?”

I’ve already thought about that. I really, really want to depend on illumination. But.....

“If there’s anyone in this hospital, they might realize we are here because of the light and run away. Let’s move forward with just the moonlight.”

“Haah...”

The two of us move along in the darkness. The building creaked with the strong wind. From somewhere the sound of dripping water can be heard.

What about neighbours around this abandoned hospital? There’s not even a single building around. Only endless forest and vast hills and fields. The raging wind shook the troop of trees and the sound of the rustling leaves resounds.

I recall the letter from the client. Just what was ‘us who live nearby’? Extending numerous kilometres from around this building, it’s really not a place where anyone would have had trespassed. Only the likes of foxes and bears live around here.

– Then, just what kind of person is the client?

– This person doesn’t have a name.

– Perhaps, it is a bitter evil spirit.

I thought back on Dazai’s words.

Around us, everything is pure darkness, nothing can be seen. The stray wind seeping through the building’s cracks howls just like a crying woman.

.....

I don’t believe in ghosts. I am a Mathematics teacher, a man of Science who masters Chemistry and Physics.

Things like vengeful spirits taking the forms of living things are vain; fear of the dark is just a made up delusion.

.....

I am not scared. I am not trembling or anything, I am not crying.

“It appeared!”

GYAAAAAAA!

My heart jumped with Dazai’s shout from somewhere in front.

Dazai turned his head, he looked at me with his mouth wide open, looked at the expression on my face, and then slowly smirked.

This damn person....!

“You’re going to be fired, you know!?”

“No way, Kunikida-kun just looked a little nervous, so I wanted to distract you.”

“I don’t give a damn about you anymore!”

I pushed Dazai aside and walked ahead.

Damn, it’s dark. I can’t see anything. Because I cannot see anything, I begin to hallucinate what is in the darkness.

In the empty darkness of the shadows, I can feel someone sighing a long breath.

Dark.

Dark.

No more.

“Doppo Poetry – flashlight!!”

It became bright.

000

After checking around the hospital for a bit, there are certainly some signs that someone had entered.

Some kind of track left behind by someone pulling something with wheels. Footprints from leather boots. Lint from clothes. However, as to whether those are the traces of the criminal who creeps in every night, or just the tracks of thieves who took advantage of the situation, it is not clear.

Our vision was guaranteed by the small flashlight manifested by my ability. But it can’t possibly make up for the thick darkness of the hospital.

It’s literally pitch dark just an inch ahead, if I light the path forward what’s under my feet will fall into deep sea darkness, if I light at my feet what’s in front will be dark like a cave. Even if we move forward gingerly, there is nothing that helps us progress with the search.

“This is definitely an act of mischief. Let’s go home.” Dazai said like he had enough and turned around on his heels.

“Oi, wait up. What happened to ‘I will seriously conduct investigations, inspections, and reasoning’? As if we are worthy enough to be called detectives with just this level. More evidence –”

“There’s no need. Look at this.”

Dazai holds up a dark coloured cord. Both ends are buried in the floor. – Why?

“Is that – wiring?”

If it is, it’s pretty new. It greatly differs from the other power cables in this building decayed by time. It must be installed only these past few months.

“If we follow this wiring –”

Dazai reels the cord and chased it to the end. It is skillfully planted and hidden, but we finally arrived at the end of the cord.

Dazai picked something else up,

“This... is a camera. Someone must have secretly installed it. It’s definitely not just in this location. Oh my, oh my, this person must’ve sent in a fake request to steal shots of Kunikida-kun who’s crying out of fear of ghosts. What a bad man.”

“Hey, I was not crying!”

“That’s right, huh. Being scared just by the dark of an abandoned building, even for an elementary student that’s too much.”

“.....”

“In the first place, the ghosts of a hospital must have no fighting spirit left in them. They died of sickness, right? Let’s say they died because of an accident then they would haunt the place they died. Those kind of ghosts, don’t have the guts to possess people to death either. At most, they only have lingering affections and regrets. Like “I didn’t want to die...” or something. Ahh, no way, no way. The actually managed to die, what a luxury.”

“Dazai.... Oi, well that, just leave it at that...”

Oh... if a vengeful spirit is listening in, what shall we do?

“If they do have a grudge against the living, at the very least it should be something like a very thin woman with pulmonary tuberculosis. Wet hair waving around messily, and with full of vengeance say, “I have a grudge, I envy living things, SAVE ME FROM THIS GLOOMY ABYSS, TAKE ME AWAY FROM THIS PAIN, aa, so much pain, my blood, my bones, my flesh, my insides, AAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHH!”

“HEEEELPPPPPP!!!!!!”

The sudden shrill scream of a female voice ringing in the dark makes me so surprised my heart feels like it's going to jump out of my throat.

But in a moment, as if cold water had drenched me, I calmed down.

That scream just now, belongs to a living person.

"That voice just now..."

"It's this way! Hurry!"

Without waiting for Dazai, I run down the rotting hallway. In the shortest time possible, I climbed down the staircase and crossed the hallways. I kick up debris as I run towards the source of the scream.

I arrived at the basement. The ceiling had come unstuck and crumbled to the floor below. Kitchenette, Pharmaceutical Management Office, X-ray Room, and the morgue are lined up.

I chase after the voice and dive into the old kitchenette.

Here she is!

From the surface of the water of the wide tank used for laundering clothes, a woman's right hand is sticking out and she's struggling desperately!

I rushed over and look into the water, at the bottom the figure of a young lady clad in undergarments can be seen. One hand was handcuffed to a rail below.

Because of the handcuffs, she can't come up to the surface! She's being drowned to death!

"What the hell is this -!?"

"We have to break this iron grill!"

Dazai yelled while grasping the grill. Firmly fixed to the tank was a gigantic iron grill that acts as a lid to preventing the lady from escaping.

I grabbed it with both hands and shook it with all my strength. It is also being padlocked, there's no way it can come off just by brute strength.

My eyes met with the lady in the water. A reddish brown pupil. She opened her eyes as wide as she can, that pupil of hers pleading. Help.

"I am saving you now! Go to the edge of the tank!"

I waved my hands, instructing her to move. Maybe she did realized, the lady had her back pressed to the wall of the tank and shrunk her body.

I took the wire gun out of my waist. I released the safety, and aimed towards the outer wall of the tank.

“Get down, Dazai!”

So it won't ricochet towards the lady inside, I calculated the angle, then shoot!

The wall that got hit punctured and cracked. It split and the water flowed out.

I aimed towards that crack and did a roundhouse kick!

The revolving power I received crushed the ceramic and mortared wall when my heel made contact. A huge hole formed and water flowed out of it in huge amounts.

“Cough... Cough, cough!”

Water gushed out from the hole, soon the water level was beneath the lady's face and her breathing resumed like she had lusted for it. Somehow, we seem to have made it in time.

Dazai turned a huge tap and the water stopped flowing.

“Are you alright?” I handed her a handkerchief from within the grills. The lady took it with her still trembling fingers.

“It looked like someone had tried to drown you... did you see who did it?” Dazai asked.

Coughing wildly, the lady who was choking on air finally let out her voice.

“I – was abducted. The day I visited Yokohama for work, suddenly my consciousness disappeared – and before I knew it, I am already here.”

Dazai and I exchanged glances.

000

Working together with Dazai, we broke the grills and the cuffs and saved the lady. The iron grills are padlocked thrice and with no other choice, I used the butt of the wire gun to hit it to break.

“My name is Sasaki Nobuko. I am teaching at a university in Tokyo. When I reached Yokohama, I unexpectedly lost my senses... and before I knew it I am here.”

Miss Sasaki who was dripping wet and blue in the face still managed to explain firmly.

“Sasaki-san, do you know how many days ago since you lost your senses and got abducted, as you have mentioned?”

“I must apologize... I lost my senses, so I can't say in detail... But speaking from the condition of my body and empty stomach, I don't think more than two or three days have passed.”

The days the victims of the *Serial Disappearance of Yokohama's Visitors* case disappeared was between thirty-five to seven days ago. If what this Miss said is true, then there's a high possibility that there is a twelfth victim.

“.....”

From just now, Dazai has been keeping quiet with his arms folded, vehemently thinking of something.

Miss Sasaki is a black-haired and slightly on the thinner side kind of woman. Her age might be around mine.

Her body was shaking. Was her clothes taken away from her after the abduction, leaving her in meager underwear and undershirt only? Even though she had put on the overcoat Dazai had lent her, in this time of the night, with her dripping half-naked wet body, it's impossible not to shake.

Shivering in the cold, her hand that's holding onto my arm, her legs that's stretched out on the floor were dreadfully thin. The clothes clinging to her skin drew a seductive curve. Her skin is transiently white, as if one would think it's transparent.

The wet hair sticking to her nape trickles droplets of water onto her chest. For some reason, with no explanation, I averted my eyes.

“More importantly, there should be more people abducted in the same way as me somewhere in this building! I heard their voices.”

“Wha-?”

Other missing people too? So they were also abducted and confined here?

“I'll guide you! This way, please.” The lady, while disoriented, stood up and planned to be our guide.

..... However.

“....Wait.” I held out my hand to stop Miss Sasaki.

“Dazai, how do you see this situation?”

“Sasaki-san's appearance looks erotic.” Dazai said with a serious look.

“Be serious!”

“.... Hmm, we did too much.” Dazai folds his arm and replied once more.

“We came to this abandoned building to investigate the mysterious sounds and light, right? Instead, we discovered the missing victim from the serial disappearance case. These should've been two separate, unrelated cases. If we put aside the fact that we are in charge for both cases.... Sasaki-san, when was the last time you saw the criminal?”

“I am really sorry, but I've never once seen his face properly... But, when I regained consciousness, the tap to the tank was already running and the water level was already close to my face. Perhaps, the criminal himself turned the tap on around five minutes before I woke up.”

Because she yelled at that time, we heard. It's just really close timing.

"Then the criminal should've been here until about a while ago. I can't help but think that he had realized we were walking close. If so, then why did he do this?"

"So he panicked upon learning of our presence, or –"

It's a meticulously planned trap?

But fearing some kind of trap and leaving things like this is out of the question.

In this building, there are missing victims, if there is a chance they are being confined here, then we cannot afford to not save them.

"Thirty-five days have already passed since the first victim disappeared. If he had been confined here since then, it is a matter of his life. Dazai, escort the lady and follow me."

I held on to my gun and proceeded down the hallway.

After my senses told me to send a report to the police, the place that we reached due to Miss Sasaki's guidance is the morgue. Corpses are valuables, so to prevent robbery, the door is sturdier than usual. The iron door is locked with a latch. It's also suitable to imprison living people in.

After making sure there were no traps, we broke the latch open and rushed in. Crossing both wrists over each other, I aimed the mouth of the gun and the flashlight forwards.

The morgue spans for about ten meters and terrifyingly dark. Most of the things have been either moved out or stolen, the interior is vacant. The only things left are broken bits of a corpse's stretcher, torn cadaver pouches and installed on the walls are drawers of caskets.

Other than that, there is nothing. The dead nor the living. – No.

Reacting to the light of the flashlight, something within the room moved. I threw the white light of the flashlight towards that direction.

"H.... Help me..."

Someone's there.

In an iron cage along the wall, there's a total of four people. Just like Miss Sasaki, everyone's in simple undergarments.

"Where is this?"

"The yell of the female voice earlier... what happened to it?"

"Calm down. We are here to save you. We already saved the screaming woman. Is anyone hurt?"

"N-no, but, where is this? Why are we here?"

I went closer to confirm the situation. The entrance is on the opposite side; a wire netted cage used to ship off wild beasts nailed into the wall. It seems difficult to take off with the tools we have in hand. The cage itself is made robust, breaking it apart will probably take time.

"It's an electrical lock terminal, isn't it?" Dazai sighed and went closer to the front of the cage's lock and confirmed. "A passcode huh, is it a biological imprint... or some kind of keyword... '*Open Sesame*'! '*Flash Thunder*'! '*I am sending a lifetime's worth of disgrace*'! Hmm.... It won't open. Looks like there's no other choice than to break it."

The heck was that last one?

"To break it open is probably, somewhere around here like this –"

The moment Dazai reached out to touch the lock terminal, Miss Sasaki yelled like she's about to snap.

"You can't, you are not allowed to touch that lock!"

Dazai was surprised and turned around. A red lamp lighted inside the lock terminal.

From above, the sound of something metal drops, the sound of something opening.

Inside the cage, milky white smoke scatters and spreads. The me that instinctively rushed away could feel my eyes and throat hurting like they were being stabbed.

The startled missing people inside the cage shrieked.

"Poison gas!"

Tears sprung due to the intense pain. My vision falters. The world blurs. Just like everything and anything is dancing. Just how much did I inhale? But there's no way I can abandon the victims. I reach my hand out towards the cage.

"We can't go closer, it's already too late!"

Someone grabbed my arm and pulled me back. So loud. I have to save them. The victims cannot die.

That's what's ideal. That's how the world should be.

"Kunikida-kun! Hurry!" Dazai's voice yells from somewhere in the back.

I don't want to. This is wrong.

"You can't!"

Miss Sasaki holds me tight and stops me. Why. Why did you stop me? People cannot be allowed to die. In front of my own two eyes, not anyone –

I let Dazai lead me away to leave the room behind me. What was I yelling, I have not the slightest recollection.

The four confined people all died.

-Chapter 1 END-

Chapter 2
Translator: Kuririn
Editor: Janey

21st

I went home later that night and headed towards the ink stone, silent.

Although this day is engraved into an unforgettable memory, I cannot deem it acceptable to note it down into words.

No matter what hardships, I shall endure; No matter how shamed, I shall laugh.

Silent, again silent.

At the table where I work at the agency, I read the newspaper.

Since this morning, the media is in an uproar, even on TV and on the net, a certain sensational news is spreading wildly.

‘The Victims of Yokohama’s Serial Disappearance, Discovered and Dead’

‘Died Due to A Private Detective Agency’s Arbitrary Judgment?’

And then there were pictures. White smoke, the agonized victims, and me holding on to the steel cage.

Although it’s not on the papers yet, it’s probably only a matter of time until it is.

The phones in the agency won’t stop ringing since morning. Although it’s mostly calls of complaints, lawsuits from bereaved families would probably come in too. What’s more, the whereabouts of the remaining seven missing people has yet to be known.

Just what kind of person took these pictures when the poisonous gas killed the victims and spreads it to society?

The phone on my desk rang with a tone that hits my nerves.

I extended my hand towards the receiver.

Faster than I could reach for it, Dazai picked the receiver up and instantly placed it back on the machine. The ringtone got cut off.

“This is what the enemy is aiming for.” A bright voice. He was holding the pictures.

“At the very least on the bright side; Kunikida-kun, your pictures were taken quiet handsomely.”

I was about to take the pictures from his hands back without another word, but he quickly hoisted his hand up, preventing me from doing so.

“How about if you just went home? You look terrible.”

“... I am not going home. I have work to do.”

“You’re still so hardworking even under such dire circumstances. Just as I was about to enter the agency’s office, I had stones thrown at me twice.”

I looked outside. A number of protestors were standing outside the agency, creating a disturbance. There’ll be more tomorrow.

“Hardworking? Idiot. There’s a job we have to put first before everything else, right? Finding the criminal.”

“Well..... That’s true, just as you said.” Dazai complied with a blank face.

“Where’s Miss Sasaki?”

"Getting a check-up. Right now, Yosano-sensei is taking a look at her in the infirmary. There seems to be nothing big though."

"Let's listen to what she has to say."

I stand. Miss Sasaki is the only witness who came in direct contact with the criminal and got out alive. From his kidnapping techniques, we might be able to know who the criminal is.

As I stood to go after Dazai who headed towards the infirmary first, my eyes landed on the photos. Mine, Miss Sasaki's and even the victims' faces were in the photos, but Dazai only had the hem of his coat taken.

Just how did that guy avoid a photograph taken in secret?

000

"I apologize deeply... I wanted to be some sort of help, but...."

The helpless lady hung her head in shame at the infirmary.

"My body was originally already weak and there are times when I lose consciousness due to anemia. Especially on the day of the incident, my body's condition was really bad... I am afraid that caused me to lose consciousness at the train station."

If that's the case, then we do not know how the criminal looks like or his modus operandi. However –

"Even so, after you fainted there must've been someone who abducted you amidst the confusion."

Kidnapping or whatnot in the middle of Yokohama Station, in such a place where there's too many people, it's impossible. Carrying a fainted woman around is all the more eye-catching. Does the criminal work in groups? Or perhaps he uses an extremely clever trick –?

"For yesterday.... I am really thankful. If you didn't help me at the time, my life would no longer be here. And not only that, for nursing me and helping me in whatever way too... Even if I am not someone you know nor someone that can be depended on."

Miss Sasaki hung her slender neck down in silence. She didn't speak after that. That, coupled with her thinness and whiteness made her look like a half-finished doll whose string had just been cut off.

Practically, it's the same as if her string of life had been cut off. Almost killed by an unknown murderer, without knowing the reason why, not knowing whether even now her life might still be targeted or not.

"Moreover, letting me stay at your residence last night... I've been such trouble..."

.....Hm?

"Stayed? Where?"

"My place." Dazai nonchalantly replied.

.....

.....Is such a thing acceptable? At this time and age?

"Dazai-sama..... Thank you very much. That is..... I've really been.... under your care."

For some reason, Miss Sasaki's cheeks turned red.

"What's wrong, Kunikida-kun? You're making a really weird face right now, you know?"

"Dazai, no matter how you look at it, aren't you moving too fast?"

"No, that's not right. I was the one who asked.... out of necessity."

"No, no, don't be bothered by it. It's just a gentlemanly thing to do. I've been frequently asked the same thing from other people I just met too." Dazai returned a smile.

.....

I am not into frivolous and thoughtless love affairs. A couple should modestly respect each other.

Consequently, I refuse one-night stands, just wanting to be intimate, and an unplanned spontaneous affair cannot be forgiven; those kinds of actions should be criticized.

Consequently, consequently. No matter how popular Dazai is, I am not in the least bit jealous. Nor am I frustrated. I am seriously not jealous.

000

"What an unfortunate beauty."

Back in the infirmary, while we were preparing the things needed for a check-up, Dazai spoke, grinning.

"You like that kind of girl, huh?"

"Why don't you go and marry a cicada?"

A relationship between a man and a woman should be pure and innocent. After they ideally complete their spouses, they should remain married for life. That is my 'ideal'.

The truth is, it is written in my notebook.

"What about you, Kunikida-kun? What do you think of Miss Sasaki?"

"A witness of a case as she is a victim of said case. That is all."

"Just because I cannot imagine it at all, I am going to ask... What kind of woman is your ideal type?"

"Do you want to read it?"

I opened the notebook to the 'Spouse' page and showed him. All my plans were written out.

"Long! Is this everything!?"

Dazai's face hardens as he reads through the page.

"...Wow. No, no, no, that is to be expected.... Wow, eehh??"

"What kind of reaction is that? Is it weird?"

"Nope, I think it's good. I think all men can empathize with such ideals.... With each and every entry written in that page."

"Right? There's nothing wrong about aiming for an ideal woman."

"Exactly, that's exactly it, Kunikida-kun. But I am going to say just one thing, it is better if you don't show that page to women. It's a turn off. Even right now, I am holding back from shouting "Such a woman doesn't exist!"

Is that so?

"Well, if you understand let's continue with our job. We have to track down clues about the kidnapper. Dazai, did you notice anything?"

"There's just one thing."

"What is it?"

"If you want to be an ideal type to women, first of all you have to do something about those boring glasses."

Dazai lightly stole my glasses and put it on his own nose. Not suitable.

"Enough with that talk! Return it!"

As long as it's allowed at work, these glasses are enough. It's not like anyone will bother whether I changed my glasses or not.

Dazai with glasses is a really laughable look. For some reason, he looks more stupid than usual.

"..... Glasses?"

Glasses. The victim's pictures. Face. Surveillance camera. Everyone, the hotel's –

"What's wrong, Kunikida-kun?"

The missing victims who left the hotel on their own two feet. Everyone was staying in Yokohama alone. The surveillance photos from the hotel's entrance.

"Let's go, Dazai." I stole the glasses back from Dazai and put it on again.

"I know who the criminal is."

000

The sea wind is blowing at Yokohama Bay. Dazai and I stood by the opening of the estuary at the seaside of Yokohama Bay.

If you look at the sky, the sun is high up there, at the bottom of the blue created by clouds, a white light breaks out and pours over the tops of our heads. However, my heart is not sunny.

A familiar taxi pulled up in front of us.

"Inspector Kunikida! Quickly hop in!" A familiar taxi driver waved his hand this way. We quickly got in the cab. "Sorry, for suddenly calling you."

"If it's the Agency's, no, Inspector Kunikida's important affair; even through fire and storm, I am there! Well then, what shall we do? Is there a place you have to go to at the speed of light? I will bring you there faster than the speed limit will allow!"

"Don't go over the speed limit. Actually, it's about the disappearance case we talked about before, I know who the criminal is."

"What did you say!? I saw the report on the abandoned hospital. The victims who lost their lives... It's very regrettable..... So you're going to capture the culprit now, right? I am with you! We ought to go quickly, lest the culprit runs away. Just where is this place where the brutal kidnapping happened!?"

"It's here."

"Huh?"

"You are the culprit. And the place where the kidnapping happened is here, in this taxi."

"Huh... What did you say? I don't understand..."

"I've thought about it. In this metropolis, who is capable of kidnapping people without standing out? Just where can someone be caught off-guard while being with only another person you don't recognize in an entrapped room? It's here. You let them breathe sleeping gas and kidnapped them while they were unconscious. You prevented yourself from breathing in the gas with a mask."

"No.... no, no, no, no. Wait a minute. According to the investigation, the victims walked somewhere on their own two feet and somehow just disappeared, there were no traces that they rode a vehicle or recordings that they entered buildings, that was what I heard. If every one of the victims did rode this taxi, won't someone in town notice?"

"That's right. Every one of the victims did rode this taxi. However, no matter how much the police investigates, they did not find any recordings. That's because they checked the wrong date. The day they rode this taxi wasn't the day they disappeared."

"What... do you mean?"

"Well, well, Kunikida-kun. If you keep answering every last one of his questions, there's no bottom to this. I am going to explain what happened in order, okay?"

Dazai interrupted halfway and continued with the reasoning.

"Driver-san, while you were doing your daily job, you were also looking for a particular type of passenger. The conditions are simple. 'Comes to Yokohama alone and is heading towards a hotel', 'parts of their faces are covered with hats, glasses, sunglasses and so on', 'their physique must resemble yours' – because you have a small build. As long as they meet these conditions even a woman is okay. That way, the relevance between the victims disappear and puts the investigation in disorder."

"Just what... do you mean?"

"Keep your rebuttals until the end. You are a driver who goes around these parts. No matter how much you estimate, when two or three days have passed there is bound to be someone who meets your conditions. And when they do appear, just like Kunikida-kun said, you would let out sleeping gas inside the car and let them breathe it in. Then you would take them to a hidden place and lock them up, and take their clothes and things. That's the reason why the victims in the abandoned hospital are almost naked. Well then, this is the part where you show us your true colours."

Dazai clapped his hands happily and continued talking.

"You wear the clothes of the victims and disguise into them. Just as you said last night, if you put on make-up, stuff cotton into your cheeks or on the body, it is possible to disguise yourself reasonably well. It goes without saying that you did thorough training, and what's more, you chose victims that you can disguise yourself into with confidence. On top of that, what you were tricking were not humans, but 'footage'. You went to the hotels the victims were heading towards to and purposefully let yourself be filmed by the security camera."

I recall the footage from the security camera used in the investigation. When I think about it now, out of the eleven victims, six wore glasses, two wore sunglasses; a total of eight people is too high of a ratio. The remaining three had hats or long hair, only a part of their faces were recorded in the footage. The reason he can disguise himself so easily is because he chose victims with particular traits.

"The rest is easy. You put the victims' things in the hotel room and openly leave the hotel the next day. And because in the footage, the person entering the hotel, in the reception and the one leaving is all the same person, the police ended up investigating the traces of the victims only after they left the hotel. It goes without saying that they wouldn't find said traces, right? You have profound knowledge about the streets of Yokohama, you know the places where evidence will be left behind if you go, places you can run to without being caught on tape. The more we search, it looks as if the victims dodge being caught on camera and disappear by their own will."

"That is outrageous. Even if you state such a hypothesis based only on reasoning, evidence, that's right. There is no evidence."

"I wonder. Just like Miss Sasaki's kidnapping, it's a possibility that you are doing this alone." I continued with Dazai's reasoning in turn. "Kidnapping Miss Sasaki who lost her consciousness was the easiest, for you it must be an unexpected good fortune. Normally, if there's someone who is suddenly sick and fainted, the people in the vicinity would call an ambulance. However, it takes time for the ambulance to arrive. But the location was a train station. If it's a station, there's usually a taxi waiting who can leave immediately. You happened to volunteer yourself with good intention to the lady and previously decided to let her ride the taxi. Then you openly took her away. The only difference is that you didn't take her to a hospital."

"That's....."

The driver looked like he wanted to say something, but didn't say anything at all after that. His expression isn't clear from my angle.

My gaze shifted to the car's interior. Only slightly sticking in its gaps, were white particles that I picked up with my finger.

"If you're going to turn yourself in, it's better to do it quickly. Proof is going to show up soon. For example, in this car.... You might clean all you can after you are done with the crime, but the particles from the gas residue are still left behind. If we do an analysis on it, its composition will immediately show up."

"That's... I have no recollection. A passenger might have scattered some. Such a thing is possible. There's no way it can be proof." The driver denied with a choked voice.

However, his denial is the same as him confessing.

"Even without proof, there's no one else but you."

I continued my argument further.

"The modus operandi Dazai said just now can only work in the taxi the victims rode. You said that two of the victims rode your taxi, that's the same as confessing that the other nine also did."

"Inspector Kunikida. That is not physical proof."

Without meeting my eyes, the driver said clearly.

"Everything that you said was only situational evidence. Even if you find lethal weapons in my house, there's no footage of me from the crime. Even if I could be prosecuted, I can't be charged guilty."

It's my turn to be silent.

It's just as he says. To charge this person guilty, some sort of physical evidence that connects the victims and the driver – blood, fingerprint, video footage, some kind of confession that no one other than the criminal knows – those kind of things are needed. As of this moment, there is no physical evidence like that yet. What's more, it's possible that it might end up being a false charge due to lack of suspicion. From the driver's way of speaking, the evidence is completely hidden.

He's a lot smarter than I thought. What to do –

However, his next words completely overturned my expectations.

"Inspector Kunikida... Let's do a business deal. If you can listen to my condition, I will turn myself in."

"What?"

"The condition is: to look over me and keep me safe as a client. The time limit is when the investigations are over, until then the completion of protecting me as a witness under the deal we made is seventy-two hours."

"A witness protection deal? What do you mean?"

"There is no.... time. I will be killed. I will be killed by them."

"Wait up. I don't get it. Tell me everything from the beginning. By who, and why are you being targeted!?"

"It wasn't my intention to make a business deal with such people... It's because there are those without a backer involved in the organs selling business, I am going to taste their wrath! This is bad.... This is really bad, I can't even contact the buyer. I am going to be thrown away! Why? I am not supposed to get discovered... Soon, those people are going to..."

"I see – So that's how it is." Dazai put his hand on his chin and nodded by himself.

"Oi, Dazai! Just what did he mean!? What is he saying!?"

"It's exactly as you heard it. He was selling the victims to an organ selling syndicate. But because in merely a month, a large quantity of organs are going around, the price of organs temporarily dropped and the market is in chaos. Let's say, a large company with a complex management has been supplying a certain market, and a smaller business suddenly cuts in and tampers with it. What do you think will happen?"

"The large company – will get angry?"

"If it's a clean company it will be fair competition. But, if it's an underground company that is in charge of supplying internal organs, they're a bunch that treats blood and violence as currency. If those guys who fear none even their own death gods get angry...."

At that moment, something crashed the car.

And then something hit the car continuously. A high-pitched sound resounded.

The right side of the taxi we are riding shook. The car window shattered.

"We're under fire! Lower your heads!"

I shouted. The shards from the window glass showered into the interior of the car; it's like the car shook from the battering of a hammer.

"It's them! H-help... I don't want to die!"

"Oi, wait up!" The driver opened the door and ran towards the opposite side of the attack.

"Kunikida-kun, we can't let the driver get away or let him be killed, we are in the thick of the case's truth! Catching him comes first before the enemy!"

Dazai, who was lying face down, shouted. I know that without him having to say it, but the situation is really difficult.

"I am going after the driver, so Kunikida-kun, please distract the enemy!"

"Wait, operating alone is dangerous! Dazai!"

Without listening to me, Dazai darted off. I can't let a new guy like him work alone in his first gunfire attack. But the fact is that there is no other option than this.

While cursing at the enemy under my breath, I looked at them. There are three of them. Black clothes and black glasses. They are armed with a sub-machinegun smuggled from overseas. Suddenly, in the streets that turned into a severe battleground that has no leniency, judging from their clothes and their skills – "Damn it, this is the worst! If it isn't the Port Mafia!"

The Port Mafia is an illegal organization that has their headquarters based around Yokohama Bay. They are an underworld organization by nature and are cruel and stern, by their code the boss holds absolute supremacy and, with his orders, they will unite to pulverize an enemy. They are the most brutal illegal organization in all of Yokohama.

And there are currently three of the people from that Port Mafia here. With time, I will be crushed to death.

“Doppo Poetry – Flash grenade!”

I spelled it on the notebook, and ripped the page out. I clutched at the piece of paper, and it changes shape to a grenade in my fist.

From the broken window, I threw the flash grenade at the three enemies.

The flash grenade is a weapon that aims to take away the sight and hearing of the enemy temporarily.

If there is a sick person near the enemy where the explosion takes place, the sound and light from the explosion is to the point where it can kill the said sick person. I bet they didn’t expect to be retaliated with a flash grenade, the mafias crouched on the floor and pressed on their temporal lobes.

In that brief moment, I jumped out of the car and dashed towards the enemies.

I hit the neck of the closest mafia with my elbow and he dropped to the ground, and then kicked the other one and sent him flying.

The last one tried to hit me with his gun. I turned my body sideways and evaded with a sway.

With his stance off, I grabbed his wrist and twisted it. I continue to twist his wrist counter-clockwise and threw the enemy away with a move called, the Four Directions Throw*.

The mafia drew an arc in the air before he crashed on the ground, head first and promptly blacked out.

“Oh my, oh my.” After making sure everyone is out cold, I walked back to the side of the taxi.

It’ll be great if things go well on Dazai’s side too....

Suddenly, there’s a colossal thirst for blood coming from behind. Before I could turn around, it’s already on my side. In the place I was standing only until recently, a black stream of torrent ran through me.

The torrent collided with the taxi and just like that, cuts the car into two.

The car splits into two perfect halves, and bounced into the air while screws and rods scattered from the cross-section. I didn’t have the time to be astonished, I kicked the ground and dodged repeatedly. The nearby posts, guardrails, were being torn down to pieces.

I did a 180-degree turn on the ground and from afar saw a small young man dressed in a black overcoat.

“Cough, cough –”

So, he’s the person with the killing intent.

“Cough – I came here to scorn as a side job, but to get the better of three men in just a moment, how praiseworthy. Next, let my Rashomon be your rival.”

Without any weapons or a battle stance, the occasionally coughing young man simply walked over. But a rabid malice exploded soundlessly from his whole body.

A short stature in a black overcoat. With a black torrent as his ability. The black hellhound of the Port Mafia.

“You bastard – You are Akutagawa Ryunosuke from the Port Mafia!”

“I am, indeed. By the boss’s order, I came to behead the fool who dares mess with the mafia’s territory. Where is he?”

“He’s not here. He ran away with his tail between his legs.”

I pointed to the direction the driver escaped to. But my gaze was still glued to Akutagawa. I won't let him out of sight for even a moment.

The worst of the worst had come. When it comes to the Port Mafia's Akutagawa, even the underworld's toughest guys would run away crying when they hear his name.

The Black-Fanged Hellhound. An ability user who brings calamity and disaster. A disciple of tragedy and despair. His name is coloured in darkness.

Although this is the first time I've witnessed it, from what I can see when he split the taxi in two, he's a much bigger threat than the rumours say. What to do?

Simple. Akutagawa's aim is the kidnapper. If Akutagawa is really such a dangerous enemy, there is no reason to protect the kidnapper with my life. To withdraw meekly is the easiest way out.

"He is a witness. Until I hear where the remaining missing people are, I can't let him be killed. If you want to go after him, take me down first."

"Putting your life on the line to protect a murderer. You would go that far, huh."

Damn it. Me and my stupid personality.

However, as a member of the Armed Detective Agency, I cannot let the witness of a case be killed helplessly by a third party.

'Do the things you should do.' I recited the words on the notebook.

Akutagawa's black cloak wriggled. It's as if the souls of a thousand vengeful spirits gathered and condensed into one transient form. Something resigned into the cloth before it starts to take the shape of many sharp fangs or nails.

"The hunting dog of the Port Mafia, Akutagawa Ryunosuke. Greetings."

"A member of the Armed Detective Agency, Kunikida Doppo. Greetings."

The black fangs that radiated from Akutagawa suddenly comes rushing like a sudden shower. I jumped sideways. A few of them shredded my clothes and the remaining created countless holes in the wall behind me.

Before he could recall the black fangs back and send them at me again, I quickly wrote in the notebook and tore it off.

The piece of paper took the shape of a wire gun again. I pulled the trigger and shot a hook.

But before the steel of the wire gun could hit Akutagawa, it was deflected by an invisible wall.

"What...!?"

He didn't look like he did any defensive moves. Is this also his ability?

Faster than I could pull the wire that has been shot into the air, a part of Akutagawa's overcoat changed into the head of a hungry beast. Giving out a roar, the head of the hungry beast rushed forward horizontally. Fast!

I was going to twist my body to dodge, but my left shoulder got pierced by a fang. Fresh blood spurts. However, I didn't have the time to stop the bleeding. The fangs keeps coming at me and I could only move backwards to dodge it. I could not retaliate, let alone even get close!

"Does the Armed Detective Agency only know how to run away? How boring." spat Akutagawa and he stood upright.

Cold sweat runs down my cheeks – Strong.

The lethal fangs could fly several meters at a high speed, I can't do anything except dodge, let alone retaliate. Even my flying weapon was knocked down easily. Even if good luck is on my side, there is that mysterious invisible wall from earlier. There is no blind spot.

Dodging the attacks with no rest in between, the moment I landed on the pavement, an unidentifiable chill runs down my spine.

From under my feet, the spear-like black fangs that pierced the pavement all blow up in one go.

While my attention was drawn into the air, other black fangs were drilling into the ground!

I twisted my body to jump again, but I put too much weight down. I won't make it.

My side was pierced with a fang and penetrated all the way to my back.

"Guagghhhh.....!" Extreme pain clouded my vision.

Unable to bear the pain, I went down on my knees. This is bad, the next one is coming. If I stop moving now, his follow-up attack will kill me. However, there's nothing I can do.

Rashomon's black cloth wrapped around my neck. My feet left the ground. The black cloth flexed like a great snake and strongly slapped me to the wall.

"How foolish, after all you are just an underpaid detective agency. I shall do you a favour and cut your neck right here, right now."

The black cloth tightened. The world dyed red.

"Every single last person... Don't get in the way of my work!"

While strangling the black cloth, I shot the wire gun. But my target is not Akutagawa.

The one I am shooting the hook at is what is beside him, the water pipe running along the buildings. The water starts spurting at Akutagawa's direction.

"Wha-....?"

Akutagawa put his arms up to defend against the water, the road Akutagawa stood on was completely being soaked by the high-pressured water.

"Fool, as if I would be scared by a little water."

I opened the notebook with my left hand. While making the wire gun earlier, I wrote on a second page.

"Doppo Poetry – Stun gun!"

I turned the high-voltage mobile stun gun on and threw it towards the puddle of water.

Flash. Stars sparked from the ground.

"Aaaaaaaa!?"

Using the body of water as a conductor, the stun gun flashes purple and white.

Like a snake, the purple lightning rushed towards the already wet Akutagawa.

The purple lightning sparked like the second sun leaving the sound of explosion on the ground, then completely disappeared.

The black cloth of Rashomon that wrapped around my neck released me, and I fell to the pavement. While clutching at my hurting neck and sides, I looked at Akutagawa.

Akutagawa is crouching. From his whole body, steam and white smoke rise.

"Ku....kukukuku.... hahaha."

Akutagawa's crouching shoulders shook as he laughed. After receiving such an electric shock he could still move.

"So the Armed Detective Agency is not just a collection of buffoons. This is great. This is really great."

"....If you're going to come then come (that's what she said), my notebook still has many pages left I could expend them."

I forced my limbs to stand and held the wire gun again.

"By all means, I want to test whether a bastard like you has the capacity to actually overthrow me or not... but unfortunately, it looks like some kind of nuisance had come to meddle."

Akutagawa faced forward, the sound of the police force's patrol cars and whistles are coming closer. It seems like they received a report on the gunfight.

"Wherever that traitor runs to, I can hunt him down. This time I shall retreat. The continuation shall come soon."

While coughing, Akutagawa turned his back on me. He left just like that. (Aw he didn't stay the morning after poor knkd) It's like he's going home after a boring walk. To tell the truth, whether we continue fighting or retreat, there really isn't going to be much difference.

"Don't ever come back!" While seeing Akutagawa off, I went down on my knees.

Akutagawa of the Port Mafia. He's no different from the rumours, no, he's more than the rumours made him to be. I refuse to fight him for a second time.

I want to go home and sleep like a corpse.

000

Or so I say, but there is no way I can sleep. After my short break, I took off to the agency again. It's to report the details of the case. After receiving quick medication for my wounds in the Agency's infirmary, I went back to the office and Dazai was already there, sipping tea after his work is done.

"Dazai. You captured the driver, right?"

"Of course. After capturing him I immediately handed him over to the police. Although, I could do happier when this can be over with without the criminal being murdered by the mafia."

I calmed down. Dazai is not as stupid as he first seemed.

When the mafia attacked, and at the same time that Dazai left to do something else, I doubted him, "Did he run because he sensed the mafia's invasion?" But he settled everything perfectly, so I am going leave it as needless anxiety.

"Well then, we are going to end it with that driver being the criminal for this serial case?"

We ran around busying ourselves, but there is no reward. The police force will probably just settle it by granting us a meager letter of thanks. Well, well.

"I don't feel like working anymore today. Let's go have a drink after duties are over."

"Senpai's treat?" A happy and smiling Dazai asked.

"What an unpleasant junior. It's my treat, so work seriously tomorrow."

I returned to my desk and finished the leftover work.

I looked over the circulated documents and picked up calls coming from several places. Then I approved the report for the case that just took place.

When I casually took a look at the office's computer, an e-mail arrived. Without paying much attention, I scanned through it.

The contents caught my eyes.

I read until the end, then read it again from the beginning.

"Dazai." When I called his name, I just realized that I haven't been breathing.

"Cancel the drinking plans, work just came in."

"Ehhh? I was already planning on drinking, my stomach had already taken the shape of a sake cup."

"A request came. From the same anonymous client as the one who led us into the abandoned hospital."

My throat parched. My tongue is tied. I don't want to have to say this.

"A request to dismantle a bomb. If we don't dismantle it by tomorrow's sunset, over a hundred people will die."

—CHAPTER 2 END —

Interlude 1

Translator: Kuririn

Editor: Janey

Midnight.

In that absurdly busy shopping street, the twinkle of decorative nightlights stares silently into the distance along the street.

He is inside a car hidden from everyone.

The car was parked in a carpark devoid of any sign of life.

Inside, he was illuminated by only a soft light.

“Let’s finish the troublesome work quickly.”

Saying it to no one in particular, he murmured to himself.

He typed into the slim laptop placed on his knees. The screen filled up with characters.

“Although I suck at playing with these kinds of electronic toys.”

Accompanying his thin laugh, are his fingers lightly tapping against the keyboard. The line of characters dances.

“–But well, only this I can’t entrust to other people.”

He smiled to himself in the vague darkness.

“Well then, can the Agency and Kunikida-kun see through this trap – and protect the city of Yokohama?”

He – Dazai looked outside from the car’s window.

The flickering city lights of Yokohama was reflected upside down in the vast, dark sea –

Chapter 3
Translator: Kuririn
Editor: Janey

12th

I greeted daybreak in the Agency.

Alone, I can't sleep in the dead of night. Sitting across the solitary light.

I think of a great many deaths, of a great many doubts.

There is no difference between them and I, under the same sky and in a corner of the same vast land, never mind the people who holds each other's hands across the infinite heaven.

Oh God, please show me the way.

"We will now proceed with the company report."

I said to the participants lined around the table.

This is the Agency's meeting room that doubles as a reception room. Around the table, the clerks and detectives, there is a total of seven people attending. It is safe to say that almost all the main force of the Detective Agency are present. A meeting with a lineup of this kind is really rare.

I opened the documents and began to explain.

"For the current case, I would like to ask every one of you to check the documents at hand. To sum everything up, the Agency is the target of terrorism, and what's more, we are currently under severe scandalous criticism."

"Everyone here knows that the Agency is currently in a crappy situation. There is no need for vague talk about the bombing accident."

The one who spoke up is one of the participants: the company's exclusive female doctor, Yosano-sensei.

"I understand. This is the e-mail that the terrorist sent to us. To have a better understanding of the criminal's profile, please read through it at least once."

I opened the files. The printed contents of the letter was written in courteous style as follows.

Dear Sir,

I hope this letter finds you well.

I would like to offer my gratitude for the quick assistance in regards to the investigation of the building's case these past few days. Although I know that it is too soon, I would like to make another request.

A while ago, I have placed explosives somewhere in this city.

To start with, I would like to request the quick discovery and removal of these bombs for the safety of the public.

The time limit until the detonation of the bombs is tomorrow's sunset; it is my dearest wish for this case to be solved until said time.

Please know that these bombs that I took time to make can eliminate up to around a hundred lives. Just like in that case where the victims were in extreme pain until the very end.

Just like the white light of the setting sun, a fire that cannot be put out. Rows of buildings will collapse thoroughly, burning people will run and panic, roads will melt, burning cars will fly and crash into buildings, as if it is a living hell. To prevent such a disastrous scene from happening, I would like to request the best efforts of everyone from the Armed Detective Agency.

Although this is a useless addition, but just like the last request, I will be collecting pictures of the Agency in action (but they didn't mention this??). In the case that the Agency fails to remove the explosives, please acknowledge without any ill feelings that I will publicize said photos just like I had in the last request.

I pray for everyone's health and well-being.

Sincerely,

A Disciple of the Blue

"What a disgusting letter," Yosano-sensei spat.

"Exactly. If we think back to the reality that there were security cameras installed in the abandoned hospital, there is no mistaking that this person who calls himself 'A Disciple of the Blue' is the same person who had spread the photos that defamed the Armed Detective Agency, and is also now the mastermind behind this time's terrorism. 'If the Agency fails to remove the bombs, then just like the last time, society's faith in the Agency will be lowered even further.' I believe we are threatened in such a manner."

"So the criminal's aim is to see the Agency defamed," the president said calmly.

"I am afraid that is so."

The Agency has surpassed many fights. Even the army wouldn't jump headfirst into violence.

But, we are a commercialized business, and the client's faith in us is what makes our products sell. What's more, we can't let ourselves be powerless because of this scandal. If the information that we were to fail in removing the bombs spread and the Ministry of Justice decides to intervene, our reputation will fall to the ground, and we will be driven into a corner.

"So no one can figure out where the bomb is placed?"

"A place where a hundred people will die if it detonated,' the people at the office is trying to wash out the possible places that fit this condition. However, starting from train stations or buildings, there are numerous possibilities, it's close to impossible to search every one of them for the bomb before the deadline."

"How about searching from the security cameras?"

If I am not mistaken, just like the criminal said in that threat letter, to defame the Agency, they will need to record us failing to dismantle the bombs and be able to spread word about it. For that reason, they should be using the same hidden camera method as last time.

However –

"If the enemy is using battery-powered security cameras and/or listening bugs, it is possible for them to collect videos and voice recordings for a few days. If they're as small as dice or fountain pens,

then they can send the data wirelessly right before the devices are rendered useless by the explosion. And in addition to having the bombs hard to find, this will probably be difficult to do in real time. Just in case, we are currently asking distributors if there's anyone who had bought cameras and bugs in large numbers, but –“

There were no favourable replies to what I just said.

“What about anyone who is applicable to be called the ‘Disciple of Blue’?”

“We came up with nothing on that one too.”

‘A Disciple of the Blue’. The difference between this letter and the last one was the fact that the sender signed his name. I don't know what he's trying to say by doing that.

The only thing we know about this criminal right now is that he is very knowledgeable about bombs and for some reason, has plans to cause the Agency to fall.

“Right now, we are contacting cooperating organizations and have them list the people who have professional knowledge on explosives as well as having a grudge against the Agency for us.”

“Are we still unable to get in touch with Ranpo-san?” Yosano-sensei asks.

If I am not wrong, the President himself is contacting Ranpo-san but –

“I got in contact with him this morning. It seems that the case in Kyushu is at its peak. He should be returning soon, but it will be hard to tell if he'll make it in time before sundown,” the President answered while folding his arms.

The Ranpo-san that Yosano-sensei was referring to is the Agency's main detective and an ability user, Edogawa Ranpo-san. He has a terrific ability called ‘Super Deduction’ that lets him see through crime even to the extent of murder, assault and abduction. If Ranpo-san is around right now, we should be able to solve this case quickly, but unfortunately he's on a business trip to Kyushu as requested by a government official. He is currently investigating a mysterious murder case where a dead person came back to life and killed his wife and friends. He won't be coming back anytime soon.

“We can't interview the chauffeur we have in custody?” The President asked for a third time.

“That driver is currently in midair flying around in a military cargo plane. It's an isolation method to prevent him from being assassinated by the mafia. I am afraid it'll be hard to meet up with him.”

The objective is to put him somewhere the mafia can't reach. But because of that, we can't collect information from an important witness that is the taxi driver.

“Have the military intelligence department contact him. Have him reply to our questions with a letter written from the military cargo plane.”

“I will prepare the note immediately.”

It's hard to think of that taxi driver as ‘A Disciple of the Blue’. There's no way he would purposefully send a letter to the detective agency telling us about the place where he locked his kidnapped victims up. In a way, the driver is also a victim of the notice the Blue Disciple had sent. But if that's the case, then what's the relationship between the Blue Disciple and the taxi driver?

Whatever the case, there's no other way than to expect a reply from him.

“Everyone, listen up. The case this time is a cowardly attack at the Agency. There are two objectives. Finding the terrorist who calls himself ‘A Disciple of the Blue’, and removing the bombs. The bombs with the time limit take priority. If we fail to find the bombs and let people die, we don't have

the right to call ourselves detectives. Be aware that this fight puts your pride as a human being and not as an employee on the line. Investigation, start!”

Accompanying the end of the President’s orders, everyone stood up and started to move at once.

000

A very busy investigation where we don’t even have time for a breather had started. The deadline is today’s sunset. Somewhere in this city, we have to look for bombs we don’t even know the whereabouts of. There’s no time.

In the middle of the investigation, it suddenly came to me and I picked up the telephone. I had instructed Rokuzo to do a search on the first e-mail. If he finds something, this investigation will move forward immensely.

After a long ring tone, Rokuzo finally picked up his phone.

“Hi.... This is Taguchi. I am currently... sigh.... I am currently not home... well then, ciao.”

“Oi, stop messing around. This is extremely important.”

“What the hell, it’s you, glasses? What time do you think this is? It’s only 9 in the morning, y’know?”

“The only one still sleeping at 9 in the morning is you, you scum of society. Sleep early and wake up early then go out sometimes. This is bad for your health.”

“Why are you being so haughty? You’re not my dad.”

“That’s not it. I just —”

I just cannot be your father.

After saying that halfway, I swallowed my words.

“Anyway, the situation had changed. We have to quickly figure out the sender of that letter. Is there any improvement on that front?”

“About that. It’s harder than expected. Technically speaking, to prevent being tracked down, it was sent while being connected with many hubs. This isn’t some prank done by an amateur.”

I can already feel that the other party wasn’t some amateur.

“A second e-mail came from the same sender. Can you run a check on this one too and compare the results?”

“The chance is high, but I don’t know until I do it. —It’s not like he didn’t use other methods too.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean he concealed himself under another computer program using many layers of hubs. I can start tracking from there. It’ll take time but the certainty is high. However, I have to use some underhand methods.”

“It doesn’t matter. This is more important than those trivial details. Do it.”

"You sure? This is not like you, clean-freak glasses. I recorded our conversation just now. In exchange, hand over the documents from when I infiltrated the Agency. Or else, I'll do something about this."

"I'll hand it to you when that time comes. Do it quickly."

In the first place, I do not have the authorities to hand over those documents. I lied on purpose as an excuse to get him to do it, but it seems that Rokuzo didn't realize to that extent.

"Aren't you big-hearted, glasses? Don't forget to pay the request fee separately."

After he said that, he hung up.

I briefly held the receiver for a short period of time and contemplated.

I don't have the time for my feelings to be hurt. First priority is the bombs. If we can't locate the bombs until the deadline, it'll become a huge disaster that will kill lots of people. Or so I say, but I have no lead at all.

Damn it, where had Dazai disappeared to at a time like this?

000

After searching the shopping streets, I somehow managed to find Dazai.

In an old coffee shop facing the streets, he's chatting with a lady.

"Is this your first time coming to Yokohama? Shall I show you around?"

"I must apologize, because of me.... Is it really okay? It looks like the Agency is in a huge uproar over the bombs. Kunikida-sama also looked really busy with the investigation this morning when I contacted him."

"It's because Kunikida-kun is a work monster. Did you know? If he makes an appointment around 12 in the afternoon, he would show up 10 seconds before. Isn't he just like a train?"

"I see... Is that how it is?"

"Hey Dazai! Don't slack off work! And don't use me as a topic to pick up girls!"

"And then, at the abandoned hospital, Kunikida-kun was so scared of ghosts he almost cried like a gi-"

"Listen to me!"

I landed a round kick on the back of Dazai's head who was looking like he had lots of fun talking to Miss Sasaki.

"Ouch! What the hell are you doing, Kunikida-kun? Eh? Kunikida-kun? You were around?"

"It's not 'You were around?' You knew but intentionally carried on, right? Right in the middle of such a crucial time for the agency just what the hell were you doing on a date? What's more the partner is the victim of a case."

"Jealous?"

"I am not jealous!"

I am absolutely not jealous in the least.

"No way. This lady was almost killed by the criminal and received mental trauma, right? Protecting and taking care of her heart is also part of a detective's important mission, no? Also, speaking from experience, only kindness and smiles and tolerance can treat a lady who just went through something horrible."

"That last line was nonsense, you idiot."

... At the very least, I should make a memo in my notebook later.

"But can a person who walks around wearing such frivolous and thoughtless clothing like you have a chance?"

With this level of beauty, she should at least have a boyfriend, right?

"Because you think like that, Kunikida-kun is Kunikida-kun. If you would just listen, you would know that she has no relatives, nor does she have a person close enough to rely on. Even her only lover just broke up with her not too long ago."

—I did hear about her not having a person she can rely on, but not to this extent.

"That's why, Kunikida-kun, I can do it," a grinning Dazai nudged my side.

"Do what?"

I have no idea what he's talking about..... I made a face to show him that.

"Listen up, Dazai. I came here to explain to you about what happened in the meeting that you skipped this morning. If you skip another meeting, I will take the quick and suitable measure to resuscitate you the next time you try to commit suicide."

"Oh dear... Kunikida-kun, you're actually thinking of something so nasty..." Dazai made an unpleasant face.

After being satisfied with his expression, I placed the documents at hand on the tabletop.

"It's the latest information. The transcript of when the police questioned the kidnapper, the taxi driver, has arrived. He confessed to locking the victims in the cage and placing that poisonous gas to prevent escape. But those were the only things he had done. He said he has no recollection of installing the hidden cameras that took the secret pictures. It's hard to think that he would lie when he's already in such a situation. In other words..."

"There are at least two criminals. The one who does the kidnapping and the one who does the filming. The first is the taxi driver – so the latter is the 'Blue Disciple', right?"

"I am afraid so."

"Excuse me..." Miss Sasaki said in a timid voice.

"I am just wondering if it's alright for me to listen in on such a conversation. It's the Agency's classified information regarding the investigation... it might be a violation to let someone like me who is not involved to know..."

"Sasaki-san is a victim, so of course you are involved. There's no need to worry. If that wasn't the case the rule demon that is Kunikida-kun won't start explaining in front of you."

"I am not really that strict with rules. Just a normal amount of strict."

"See? Just like this, he can be an easy-going senpai who can throw wonderful jokes at times. Well, and then? Are there any more clues about the criminal we're going after?"

"Just a normal amount..."

".... Sorry. I get it, just a normal amount. Please continue with the explanation."

Why am I getting apologized to?

"I will continue then; it's the result of checking said driver's background. As far as I can gather from the given information, he had no interaction whatsoever with the underworld society and was just a regular taxi driver. He also doesn't have any suspicious criminal acquaintances. It's hard to think that such a person can simply kidnap people and hand them over to a buyer from an organ trafficking syndicate. Apparently there's someone who told him that organs trafficking is a scheme that can get him rich quickly."

"And that's the 'Blue Disciple'? If that's so, wouldn't it be better to ask for his name from the driver?"

"He said he can't say it. If he does, he will definitely be killed next time – I really do want to make him spit it out with every fiber of my being, but unfortunately he's currently being quarantined midair by the police. By the time the arrangement for another interview with the police is made, it will already be sunset."

Just what kind of person is the criminal this time around?

Persuading the taxi driver to get into organs trafficking, then placing hidden cameras in the abandoned hospital, and on top of making bombs and placing them somewhere unknown, he threatened the Agency. Just what is his purpose?

"Excuse me. If I may be so impertinent..." Miss Sasaki who had been quiet of this time said.

"This 'Blue Disciple' that I've been hearing about from just now.... Isn't it the same criminal from the 'Blue Flag Terrorism' case?"

"That case, huh?"

The Blue Flag Terrorism Case.

The case where Rokuzo's father died in the line of duty.

When I saw the word 'Blue' I also doubted if it was the work of the same person for a moment.

"But the mastermind who called himself the 'Blue King' had died by explosion. The dead can't threaten the living. That is the truth of this world."

"Good point, Kunikida-kun. So ghosts are not scary after all, right?"

"Don't talk about ghosts for a second time."

"But... Even though the explosion was enormous, I heard that his remains were not found. Maybe he somehow managed to escape and is currently hiding somewhere..."

I was also curious about that and asked the police about it. However, there were no answers.

"According to the police's forensic investigation, there was no doubt that the Blue King had died. Their forensic skills are trustworthy. If we put into account that their fellow policemen got caught up and died in the line of duty, I don't think they would overlook anything or be wrong about it."

"But...."

"As for me, I don't know that much about the Blue King, but there might be a group of his followers that is seeking revenge on the Agency?"

What an uneducated person. With no other choice, I started to explain.

The Blue King was aiming for the attack and destruction of several government institutions and was the mastermind behind the 'Blue Flag Terrorism' case. He did so much damage after the attack was therefore said to be the worst terrorist nationwide.

Before he raised the Blue Flag, he was only a superior bureaucrat.

After he graduated as a valedictorian from the highest learning institution there is and went to study overseas, he does legislative and administrative work as a civil officer in the capital and becomes a young man who is motivated to aim for higher ranks. The situation wasn't clear as to why he decided to purge the government.

One day, a certain video was sent to a national broadcasting station. A young man who hid his face with an undyed blue flag was making a crime declaration. He called himself the 'Blue King' and lamented over the imperfect world; he also claimed that only imperfections can cover other imperfections.

"No matter how much we aspire, our neighbours still fall sick, our fathers and mothers still die, bad people are still judged as bad based on only one side."

If that's so, then let's desire for an ideal world.

Not by God's hands, but by the bloodied hands of our imperfect selves."

At the same time he made those declarations, institutions belonging to the country were attacked in three different ways. Committing arson against buildings related to the police force, colliding high speeding cars, and bombing the police headquarters. After conducting a follow-up investigation on the victims of the attack, it was made clear that they were: a murderer who killed eight people but got off scot-free due to lack of evidence, a member of the parliament who was rumoured to use the budget to aid developing countries for his personal gains, and a small group of policemen who assaulted a young legislator and hid behind the name of the law. All of them died by the attacks.

He convicted criminals who couldn't be judged by the law by committing crimes against them.

Everyone was taken aback by the assaults. Attacking multiple highly secured government institutes despite the strict defense at the same time, no one thought that was possible.

After that the Blue King repeated his crimes, condemning criminals, many times.

The police and the government who had lost their dignity ordered the discovery and capture of the Blue King nationwide. They even made a request to the Agency.

What happened after was exactly like I had talked about before. The discovery of the secret base, the infiltration and the suicide bombing. It was settled a top a mountain of corpses.

"However, if it is the doings of the Blue King, it is unclear why he would relentlessly try to defame the Detective Agency this much."

"Isn't the one he has a grudge on is you, Kunikida-kun?"

The Blue King? Has a grudge on me?

Well, it is true that I was the one who received the information regarding the pursuit of the Blue King. I was the one who contacted the police and made the investigation team move out. But – No way.

The nation's worst terrorist in all of history – His ghost.

Ever since the Blue King died up until now, he couldn't clear his resentment, so he decided to take revenge on me and the Agency–

"At any rate, until we know the true form of the criminal, we have to be cautious. We don't know when we might be attacked. Sasaki-san has to take shelter at somewhere safe too."

"Do you mean the Agency's office? However there's no one at night. Where –"

I abruptly realized what Dazai is up to.

"Don't tell me you are planning to use her protection as an excuse and bring the lady to your own house. I won't forgive you, you bastard, lewdly spending days and nights together, it's a suspicious and unhealthy relationship. Are you some kind of beast, you bastard? How outrageous, I would sympathize with her more –"

"Wait a minute, Kunikida-kun. There's nothing between Sasaki-san and I."

"Huh?"

"I am saying. The first night she stayed over, I was sleeping in the room next door; I didn't lay even a finger on her afterwards. Making advances on a person on the day they were almost killed is rude, right? There's also the consequences coming from a violent senpai."

I see.... Is that so? Then I guess I am just jumping to conclusions.

"Well, I knew Kunikida-kun was going to misunderstand, but it was interesting so I didn't stop it."

This guy.....

But in the case that such a pure and serious person like me can make such honest mistakes, "Just because she's staying over for a night you're already having such suspicions, Kunikida-kun is really perverted." With that one sentence, I couldn't explain myself or retaliate, there's no other way than keeping it all in. If only he didn't say that.

.... But of course I would be suspicious. This is Dazai we are talking about.

If only Dazai wasn't such an idiot who would seduce any woman he sees. The sense of distance with a victim of a case is hard to judge.

"Don't say such confusing things. If nothing happened then that's good. Starting from now distance yourself properly from victims and have an appropriate relationship with them. That's what you call being professional."

".....Understood."

Dazai firmly nodded and faced Miss Sasaki.

"By the way, Sasaki-san, do you have an ideal type?"

"What did you mean when you said you 'understood'!?"

He's contradicting himself. He just likes women in general.

"T-type...? Well I think the idea of types is ridiculous and it makes me ashamed... But I feel like men who can throw their ideals away and just jump into things are... wonderful."

So she said.

"Aaaahh, this is impossible, that is totally not Kunikida-kun, isn't this hopeless. Tch, I'll let you two talk in private, I am going to count the number of fingers I have on both hands."

"Hey Dazai! Don't break away from the conversation all by yourself!"

"Just what are you doing? I've forgotten which number I have counted up to!"

"Stop sulking! Just get back on your seat!"

If it was just the two of us at such a time, I wouldn't know what to say!

"Well that's.... It's because I am just a normal woman, even if I am next to a person who is striving for ideals, I cannot be of any use and even if I want to support his ideals until my heart breaks, in the end we would just tire ourselves out.... At worst, he would pick his ideals over me and I would be abandoned. That's why I refrain from dating an idealist."

Miss Sasaki who smiled fleetingly. Such a....

"It's so easy to understand Kunikida-kun's expressions."

"I-I am not thinking of anything! Don't look over here, Dazai!"

"Ouch!"

I forcibly turn his neck until he faces another way."

"You told me to come here, then you told me to look away, how puzzling! Let's return to the original topic."

What was it again?

"Ah, it was regarding Miss Sasaki's safety. Well, it's not like the police won't work together with us, but....."

"Excuse me... I am really happy that you two are going as far as letting me stay over, but as I guessed, it was a bother.... I'll be staying somewhere else starting tonight, I'll find a hotel or something, so please do not worry."

"No way. We cannot say for sure that staying at a hotel will be safe, it's also a bad sign after such a case. We also don't know when Dazai will turn into a perverted beast. Come to my place."

"Eh?"

"Eh?"

"It's not like I have anything to be guilty about!"

"No matter how you think about it, that was really suspicious! How shameless."

"That's not it! I was thinking about it innocently!"

"Hahaha, it's a lie. Sasaki-san, I can assure you that Kunikida-kun's house will be really safe. What's more, it's okay, Kunikida-kun doesn't have such desires... that's not it, it's because he treats ideals highly. Do you want to see his notebook? Kunikida-kun's ideal woman is amazing."

Dazai handed my notebook to Miss Sasaki. I instantly checked my pockets. My notebook is gone.

"Dazai! When did you take it!?"

"Look, it's this page." Dazai opened the notebook and pointed with his finger.

"Oh, is it really okay? Such a thing..."

"But you're interested, right?"

"Eh... well, truth be told, I am a little curious."

Miss Sasaki giggled and look at the words on the notebook.

She pales by the moment.

"Eh, what does this mean...? I see... But this is..."

My image of an ideal woman.

Eight pages, fifteen chapters. It's a long composition with fifty-eight entries.

"Eh... Ah, in other words.... Hmmmmmm, ah....."

I remembered Dazai's words.

"It is better if you don't show that page to women. It's a turn off."

Miss Sasaki finished reading and when she raised her head up again, the smile that was there before disappeared.

The only thing that was there was a statue-like, life-absorbing cold smile.

"Kunikida-sama."

"Yes...."

“Such a person does not exist.”

000

Someone, please bring me sake.

000

The center of our country, the capital area of Tokyo where the heart of economic and political facilities gather.

In those buildings, a lot of different types of people comes in and out. There are also people who come from all over the world working there.

That place is the Japanese US Embassy: the biggest foreign territory in this country.

It doesn't matter if it is way past noon, there will be visitors waiting for their turn in the waiting room. All of them are silent as if waiting for a trial, frozen in place thinking over something known to no one other than themselves.

The installed TV is showing a live Major League game, a middle-aged man wearing a cap is lazily telling a team off for losing a point.

I looked at Dazai who was beside me. Dazai laughed happily.

It's like he's really looking forward to the plan we are going to execute soon.

This is no laughing matter.

"Kunikida-kun, are you ready?"

"I am really concerned. I am begging you, please don't make a blunder. If we fail, we are going to be judged by the international law."

"An international criminal.... For some reason it sounds really cool. Well then, I am off!"

"Hey, Oi!"

A sudden swell of worry made me want to stop Dazai, but he already walked towards the reception desk.

Furthermore, Dazai was dressed in a tattered singlet full of patches while I am in an expensive navy business suit complete with a necktie.

Dazai stood in front of the receptionist working in the Embassy, counter number One, and said in a loud voice.

“Heeeey, is it not our turn yeeet!? We’ve been waiting for six hours nooowwww!”

Everyone within the vicinity turned their heads. The Japanese lady working as the receptionist blinked in surprise.

“No more, no more, no more, no more, I won’t wait any longer than this! Call whoever’s in charge to come out right now!”

Dazai flailed his limbs about and continued grumbling at the reception desk.

What we call a plan is dressing up as a pitiful adult male. I look at the pathetic Dazai and feels like throwing up blood.

If that was me, if I had to undertake such a role, I would drink poison and die.

“Excuse me, I am really sorry, may I know of your business here?”

The lady receptionist asked while panicking. Although what she did was praiseworthy, the other party is at fault.

“I’ve been saying it since just now, haven’t I? It’s migration, MIGRATION! Being able to immigrate to your honourable United States is a dying wish of mine from the bottom of my heart. Even so, I’ve been waiting since ages ago! Are you saying you’re going to deny me? Deny me? For a mere employee like you to make judgements in behalf of the government in such a manner is a terrible abuse of one’s authority, sister!”

“You bastard! What are you making a fuss about!? To create such a disturbance in the agency is a serious crime!”

Naturally, from the entrance, the security guards starts going after Dazai.

It’s my turn.

“Wait. I am the companion of that noisy guy over there, but do you guys have the authority to arrest him?”

I stood in front of the chasing guards.

“According to the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations Treaty Article 31 Paragraph 2, ‘The authorities of the receiving State shall not enter that part of the consular premises which is used exclusively for the purpose of the work of the consular post except with the consent of the head of the consular post or of his designee or of the head of the diplomatic mission of the sending State’! Until this man is labeled an obstruction by the head of the consular post, he is still a privileged visitor of the Embassy. If you stop his little quibble without permission, it’s going to be an international problem!”

After being roared at, the security guards becomes perplexed.

Even they should have complete knowledge of the Vienna Treaty, but hesitating after being told that it will become an ‘international problem’ is only in natural fashion for a person.

“Migration! I WANT THE PERSON IN CHARGE!”

In celebration of not being stopped by the security guards, Dazai rolled on the ground and wriggled his arms and legs. Although everything is going according to plan, it is a really reckless one.

Now then, the reason why we, the Armed Detective Agency, made this decision to come to this expensive and high-classed foreign public office that is the Embassy where the key point of diplomacy is, and attack it is...

“The terrorist is a foreigner?”

I asked. Just like before, we are in the same café that faces the main street.

“Yeap. And that, he’s a professional.” Dazai answered while sipping his coffee.

The reason why Dazai could come to such a conclusion is because a colleague from the university Miss Sasaki worked in contacted her.

“My colleague’s major in my university is crime psychology. There might be some useful information,” so she said.

Nevertheless, Miss Sasaki also said that her colleague is an acknowledged researcher in crime study. It seems like this person has been awarded several times in well-known seminars and is a capable assistant professor. Therefore, an investigation in past crimes of the same nature was done for us.

“What my colleague noticed was that, like in that threat letter, there was never a bombing crime that involves more than a hundred people in all of Japan... Of course, this is with the exception of the lives lost in past wars.”

“So, it’s a foreign crime?”

“Yes.... Overseas, there’s a number of them including political strife and terrorism based on ideology. However, there are no details regarding the types of explosives or the makers on any of the documents... I am sorry.”

“No, this is good information. This means that the Blue Disciple who made the bombs is aware of the structure and composition used during those cases. We are one step closer to the criminal.”

“Well, but... we still don’t know where he placed those bombs. Can we make it in time with such a pace?”

At the very least, there’s a need to know the criminal’s face and name. If not, we have no more leads.

Dazai placed his thumb on his lips and is thinking deeply about something.

“This criminal is hiding his true form.... So we cannot find him at all.” Dazai suddenly murmured. “I guess there’s no other choice but for me to do it.”

“Do what?”

“Hey, Kunikida-kun. In the threat letter, it clearly said that the bombs are ‘hand-made’ right? But is making a bomb that can kill over a hundred people that easy to make?”

“It certainly is hard for an average person, but for a professional it’s probably easy.”

I used to study math and the sciences and in order to continue this dangerous detective job, I have knowledge about dangerous chemicals up to a certain degree.

The chemicals used to make explosives have to be handled really carefully, and the temperature and contact environments have to be really strict. Even if a single mistake was made, it would blow up. But the materials needed are really simple and most of it can even be found in an elementary school's lab. Hydrochloric acid, nitric acid, nitrogenous fertilizer, aluminum. They are legal items that can be obtained cheaply. The problem with making bombs lies in the combination ratio and procedure, also the transportation and detonating techniques.

"Simply put, professionals who make bombs each have their own unique recipes, and I heard it they put it on the market as their own brands, but —"

"That's it. That's why the exact same bomb that was used in a previous case shouldn't be so easy to make."

"So what you are saying is... the bomb used in a case where over a hundred people can be killed and the case now is made by the same person...?"

"And not only that. Don't you find the visual portrayal of the bomb in the threat letter weird in reality?"

I stare at the letter again. *'Just like the white light of the setting sun, a fire that cannot be put out. Rows of buildings will collapse thoroughly, burned people will run and panic, the roads will melt, burning cars will fly and crashed into buildings —'*

"I thought about it, and the person who wrote this letter must've seen the same scene before."

"What?"

"Sasaki-san. Among the previous bombing cases overseas, are there some that have videos of them taped?"

"No... It doesn't look like there's any. The explosive itself is already really eye-catching, I don't think the people involved has time to take videos."

"That's normally the case. But in this threat letter, a recently bombed city is vividly portrayed. From what is written, it looks like the situation after a few minutes from the bombing. After this person placed the bombs and ran away, maybe he went back to the location. And then he saw this scene."

"So you wanted to say that the person who was responsible for the previous cases is the Blue Disciple?"

If that's the case, then the criminal's profile is showing up. A professional in explosives, was involved in the bombing cases overseas, and is now currently in Japan. However –

“It's no use. I can't understand with just that.”

“Why?”

“You might not know because you skipped the meeting, but we already cooperated with the police and the public welfare and received information on all the professional bomb makers in the country. There was no one suspicious. There was no one who has the skills or materials to make a bomb that can harm over a hundred people, and also no one who can act without surveillance in that list. That being said, there's no way a foreigner can just roam around starting from now.”

“Fufufu.” Dazai grinned.

“What is with that disgusting laugh?”

“Even the police has some information they cannot disclose to detectives. It's information on foreign secret services. I am sure they have some sort of understanding on this criminal.”

“Foreign secret services, you say?”

Foreign secret services would be the USA's CIA or NSA. The UK's MI6 is also famous. To protect the safety and welfare of their own country, they act in secret in a lot of other countries. However –

“It's impossible for foreign secret services to just hand classified information to a private company in Japan just like ours while saying, “Please go ahead”. In the first place, do you even have acquaintances in the secret service?”

“Nope.”

“See?”

“But, if we just go somewhere, I am sure we can meet one.”

–I have a bad feeling about this.

And that's why we are currently trying to sneak into the US Embassy.

The plan Dazai came up with is simple.

Create a dispute in the Embassy.

If all goes well, a higher-up will come to put things back in order and we then we can directly come in contact with them. We'll negotiate with that high official. To a secret service agent that's working overseas, the Embassy is a place of peace. If it's the Embassy, they are surely in contact with the agents.

Of course, this is a rash and forceful way to do things.

But this plan that Dazai came up with was our only sliver of hope in this dead-end of an investigation.

This is something I've come to realize when working together with Dazai, but there's something more than meets the eyes with the speed and depth of the thoughts he sometimes comes up with. Dazai is a bottomless pit. There's something he's hiding behind that eccentric behavior, you can't help but feel a somewhat rather cold – devilish wisdom.

I really cannot think of him as a vagabond with no experience. Because he keeps changing the subject whenever I asked, I never pressed for an answer, but maybe Dazai is hiding a dark past? Whatever that is, illegal deeds –

“Hey sister, please let me migrate! Hey, look over here and listen to me! Don't avert your gaze and look at me! That's right, those eyes! Come on, look here some more!”

–Never mind, he's just your regular idiot.

“Um, in that case, please fill in this form for your waiting order...” The receptionist very timidly took a piece of paper out.

“I already wrote that earlier!” Dazai screamed. Of course that's a lie. “I wrote with my favourite fountain pen and even carefully filled in all the little details, but there was no development, that's why we are having this talk now, right!?”

Dazai took a fat and black fountain pen out of his breast pocket to show her.

“This favourite pen of mine is the same type as the one a dictator in the Middle East uses. Isn’t it impressive? It’s okay if you want to look. Here you go, it’s expensive and heavy and very hard to write with. I wrote that very detailed form many times with this, of course I’ll get angry. Don’t you think so?”

That’s your fault for using that pen in the first place, I thought, but I just kept quiet and watched.

“Hey sister, I am a novelist, have you ever read my work? I’ll make you the main character in my book next time. So please call whoever’s in charge. A story of you and I committing lovers’ suicide. I will definitely write it after I migrate with this fountain pen.”

Dazai played the part of a failed novelist unexpectedly well. I felt like this is because he always picks up girls at the bar.

“Please do something about this, if this goes on things are gonna get real bad, I am gonna get killed by the public welfare. It’s because I wrote whatever I like in my novels, you see, just because I wrote that the people in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs wore wigs, I am now being targeted. This is a violation of freedom of speech, I won’t forgive the government’s oppression –! I also won’t forgive them faking their hair!”

“Oi, stop being so noisy, bro! I can’t listen to the baseball game! And what’s wrong with wigs anyway!?”

A black capped man who was watching and the live baseball game and sitting on the waiting chair shouted with a thick accented voice. But it’s impossible to stop Dazai with just that level of jeering.

“What are you saying!? It’s wrong of them to get angry just because I said they are wearing wigs! If they are gonna get that angry then they might as well expose that shining bald head of theirs to the sky from the beginning!”

“Excuse me, mister companion, but that...” The panicked employee looked at me, with eyes asking for help. However, I am sorry, this is for the sake of people’s lives.

“I am his editor. I understand your situation, but as you can see, he won’t listen to anyone. He would probably give up after being turned down by someone with power, I am sorry, but I want you to pass on the message.”

“Huh...”

The employee whose willpower had already been sucked out absentmindedly nodded, then stood up from her seat.

“P-Please wait a minute...”

She probably doesn’t want to deal with Dazai anymore than this. I understand. I felt the same way from the bottom of my heart.

We waited for a short while. The female employee came back and lead Dazai and I to another room.

“This way please.”

“This type of thing is very troubling.”

At the diplomacy room we were brought into, a bald Caucasian diplomat was waiting for us. In the name cards he handed out to us, it was written that his rank is 3rd Attaché. Not a bad catch.

But this is still not enough. He doesn’t have information regarding the secret service. The real challenge starts here.

“I symphatize with your condition.”

I lowered my head. Receiving a bow in return from a foreigner who doesn’t have such culture is baffling.

“Fleeing from a peaceful country and seeking refuge like this is unheard of in this day and age. Even if you ask the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in this country, only declination awaits. So –”

“Ah, enough with that topic. No – I am sorry, old man, you even went such lengths to prepare another room for us, but truth be told, I am not a novelist.”

I took an identification card out from my breast pocket. It’s has a black background with gold letters hemmed onto it.

“We are the Metropolitan Police Department’s Public Welfare Bureau.”

“P-Public Welfare?”

The attaché said with a confused voice. It’s not unexpected. If the other party is a public welfare officer of the recipient country, the graveness of the situation changed.

“Due to the situation, we were not able to make a formal arrangement. However, whether we are the real thing or not, I am sure you’ll understand after seeing this ID.”

I hoisted my police ID up. ‘Public Welfare’ is written in gold on a black background, my photo and affiliations are all clearly written.

The attaché took the ID and compare it to my face.

It goes without saying that the identification is fake. I created one that is made from the exact same manufacturing as the real thing with my ability, ‘Doppo Poetry’. Therefore, our lies won’t be seen through just from that ID card.

—Even if we were to be seen through, it’s from this point on.

“Due to circumstances, we are in dire need of secret information from your country. That being said, we wish to obtain information regarding the secret service’s bomb specialists currently in residing in this country. This is a very important matter that has the country’s public safety on the line. We request your speediness.”

I said the words that I’ve been memorizing since earlier.

“S-such a reckless...”

“We know that this was reckless.” I continued pressing for an answer. If you have no idea, can you please bring out someone with more authority?”

“There’s definitely someone from the secret service who keeps coming in and out of the Embassy, but I can’t just easily...”

“At this moment, we are currently in a time of war. It’s a critical moment where the lives of over a hundred people are on the line.”

After hearing that the lives of a hundred people might disappear, his face paled. He must be a good man.

“P-Please wait a minute.”

The attaché wiped the sweat off his forehead and contacted someone on the telephone that was installed in the room. In a small voice, he had a quiet, debate-like conversation with whoever’s on the other side, and faced us once again after he was done.

“Well, good news. We usually don’t adhere to such requests, but....”

He said with a smile. He sighed with a trace of relief.

“Thank you very much.”

“I was on the phone with the minister’s secretary, but it just so happens that my boss and your chief that is the director of the Public Welfare Bureau were close by and were going out for lunch together. If it’s a direct request from the director himself, I am sure discussions can be arranged. What a good turn of events.”

“....Huh.”

“I was told that your chief would be coming here shortly. Until then, please make yourselves comfortable.” While wiping off his sweat, the attaché said in relief.

....This is bad.

This is so bad.

If we are talking about the director of the Metropolitan Police Department’s Public Welfare Bureau, then it’s the top of the Police Department that holds the title of Superintendent General. He might have the authority, but that doesn’t mean he knows about the bombing threat case. Even if he does, there’s no way he would approve of stealing classified information about overseas secret services just for the sake of a bomb that might or might not exist.

What’s more, we are just a private agency that is pretending to be the Public Welfare.

“Ah, no, Mr. Attaché. We apologize... That is, we are imposing.”

"Huh? No, no, don't worry about it. Whatever kind of classified information, if it's a request from the Superintendent General, then there's no way they can reject. Please rest assured."

What to do? If the director comes now, everything will come to nothing.

"We are really imposing. Why that is so... Erm, that is..."

The attaché blankly looked back at us.

"The director won't be coming. Due to circumstances."

"Is that so? What kind of circumstances?"

This is bad. I am bad at these kinds of adlibbing. Really.

"The director... Is really busy. There's a lot of things he has to do."

"Huh, I am sure he's really busy. But in that phone call just now, he said he can come without a problem."

"Ah, that's what he said, but that wasn't what he meant. When he says that, there's always something else going on."

"...?"

"Well, various things, like... running into an acquaintance and end up chatting for a long time, buying dog food for his pet dog when it looks like it will run out, or sending documents to public offices."

"Is he a housewife?"

The attaché leaned his head to the side. Ahhh, I don't even know what I am saying.

"A-anyway, the director must not know of this exchange."

"Not know..? You mean you guys came here while keeping it a secret from your higher up?"

"There's no w-... Well, we did."

"Isn't that bad? Why?"

"It was carelessness."

"Carelessness!?" The attaché was shocked.

“Yes it was carelessness. Eh – that is, because this is an emergency, I carelessly forgot to contact him. That’s why, what was it, this is an emergency.... I carelessly forgot to contact him.”

“Why did you say that twice?”

“Due to confidentiality, I can’t say more than this. Anyway, please call the secret service agent that you know of!”

If I say any more than this, what will the situation come to?

“That is so reckless. The location of our secret service agent is also top secret. So with that kind of explanation, we can’t just...”

“Oh well... There’s no other choice.”

Dazai sighed and leaned his body forward.

“Mr. Attaché. In exchange for this tongue-tied subordinate, let me explain to you. The reason we are keeping this a secret from the director is because of a certain circumstance. You see, there’s a rumour floating around in the Public Welfare Bureau, especially those around the director, that there’s a traitor that is sending classified information to the crime bomber.”

“What did you say?”

“For that reason, there is a need cooperate with other investigators to fish out the criminal and the traitor, and that will be decided by how this negotiation goes. If the traitor learned that the director is coming over here, then the traitor might set the bombs off. Before that happens, we have to locate the bombs.”

The attaché’s expression changed after listening to that story.

“T-That is certainly a serious problem. If that was the case, do tell me sooner.”

The attaché fleetingly glanced at me.

“The reason he can’t say it is because he’s afraid of leakage of information. He might be bad at lying, but this is all for the sake of secrecy. If you were in his position as a Japanese police officer, would you be able to clearly say that your own boss might be a traitor?”

“That is true...” He nodded his head.

“Fortunately, we were able to pin down the criminal who made the bombs to a certain point. It is someone who was responsible for the bombing terrorism overseas. With an international criminal as our enemy, it is a very important investigation that has the safety of your country, as well as ours, on the line. As an organization with internal strife, we would like to work together with your country’s secret service and be done with it. Can we request your cooperation?”

“I understand. Please let me cooperate.”

Dazai..... You are amazing.....

“Let me lead you. This way please.”

The attaché hurriedly stood up and lead us the way with his hand.

The place the attaché brought us to was a room in the Embassy’s underground. It’s a private office.

With a nervous expression, he told us, “Please wait a minute,” and hurried off, leaving us behind.

“I wish you would stop bullying Mr. Attaché. He’s a good man. Probably the only good man, if I dare say.”

The man in his prime who came into the office was someone we’ve seen before.

“You are.... The man watching the baseball game in the waiting room..... Are you the United States’ secret service agent?”

It was the black-capped Caucasian. He’s definitely the middle-aged, bored-looking man watching the baseball channel in the waiting room.

“Although on my ID it says I am a janitor.” The secret service agent pinched his name badge that was on his chest to show us. “And? What are two people who are busy looking for bombs doing in a place like this, Armed Detective Agency?”

Dazai and I exchanged a look.

“So you knew?”

“Collecting all the problems that is happening in this country is my job. Not to mention that if an ability users’ organization hasn’t created such a racket since this morning, I would’ve sent information to the other side of the globe. I’ve been watching ever since you guys came into the Embassy.”

So the fact that secret services knows everything is not something that happened only in movies and novels.

“We are looking for the guy who placed the bomb somewhere in this city. It’s the same person as the one who created a similar crime overseas. Are there no documents about it? Quoting the criminal, ‘Just like the white light of the setting sun, a fire that cannot be put out,’ it’s like he’s killed more than a hundred people –“

“Ah... As expected, it’s that person.” He shook his head.

“Do you have something in mind?”

“When you say a fire that cannot be put out and a white light, it must be an aluminum-based explosive, which means it must be Alamta. Here’s the file.”

He took out a bundle of documents from the cabinet.

“Zakiel Aramta. He’s of Japanese descent and was supplying bombs to a terrorist organization in the Middle East. A year ago, he entered Japan and we are keeping an eye on him.”

“Without telling the Japanese Public Welfare?” I retorted while staring at the documents.

“Well, things happened. Our hands were tied. He’s a bomb magician and at the same time, a merchant selling explosives to terrorists. As long as he has a client list, we can catch all the anti-American ideologists in one go.”

I turned the pages of the documents. There was a profile picture of Aramta and his past bombing crimes.

“It’s the worst kind of explosive composition.” I chewed on my inner cheek. “If this blows up in Yokohama, not only a hundred people will fall victim to it.”

The kind Aramta uses professionally is a vehicle-borne improvised explosive device that has an aqueous-based explosive mixed with fine aluminum powder. Putting over hundreds of kilograms of it on an automobile, it can be detonated from a distance with a signal from a smartphone or the like. Using ammonium nitrate as the main material and acetone peroxide as its supplement. As such, it can be made cheaply and in large quantities.

Judging from its composition, its blast can kill people within a 200-meter radius from its epicenter. Even when you're not within that vicinity, the extreme heat from the blast and the aluminum fused rain can kill you.

The fact that Aramta used aluminum completely means that his aim is murder. Aluminum is a fire accelerant and while it is beaming white light, the fire from the explosion will keep increasing. That, and at the same time, the scattering 600 degrees Celcius splash will completely burn through the victims' flesh. And to finish it off, metal aluminum is a type of metal that when reacted with water, flammable hydrogenous gas will form. This means that it will burn more when you splash water on it. Because of that, putting out the fire with a hose, preventing its spread and rescuing activities will be difficult. 'Just like the white light of the setting sun, a fire that cannot be put out.' It's exactly just like those words. It is certainly the bomb of the devil.

If it exploded in a crowded place, including the second calamity caused by trains stopping and accidents, the number of deaths may surpass a thousand. What's more, if it's a bomb transported in a car, then it can easily pass police inspection and infiltrate the city. There's no way we can let such a thing explode in Yokohama.

"Where is Aramta now?"

"Two days ago, he shook off the observation of a colleague and is now missing. We were thinking that he's somewhere where he can create some kind of mess."

Damn it, to find the bombs, we first have to find Aramta.

However, just by knowing his name and background, we are making improvement. There's also a high possibility that this man named Aramta is the 'Blue Disciple'.

The reason why Aramta is threatening the Agency is still unclear as of now. Even if it's a grudge, his hands might be tied because the Agency managed to solve a previous case.

“And then? In exchange for this information, what do you want in return, Spy-san?” Dazai asked full of smiles.

“Nothing. As a citizen of a foreign country, I can’t possibly shut an eye and let over a hundred people die. For the sake of justice, I would gladly hand over the information.”

“I don’t believe you. With the exception of Kunikida-kun beside me, I am a despicable person.”

Dazai smiled as an answer. It’s true that as an agent of the United States’ Secret Service, their mission is nothing more than to ensure the safety and well-being of their own citizens.

The agent replied after a certain amount of quiet thinking.

“—If you manage to capture Aramta, do not hand him over to Public Welfare and hand him over to me in person. I want to make him cough up that client list by whatever means.”

“Not hand him over to Public Welfare, you say?” I raised my eyebrows. “If he is the criminal behind the case this time, he should be handed over to the Japanese police for questioning.”

“About that, Kunikida-kun. To get information, they are planning to ‘question’ the bomber themselves. And that is using methods illegal by international law. If they work together with police forces from other country, they wouldn’t be able to do such a vulgar thing. That’s why he wants us to secretly hand the criminal over.”

“.....”

I look at the agent in front of me. He remains expressionless and doesn’t answer. So this means he doesn’t have the intention to deny.

Breaking the law and infringing morals is not something only criminals do. But I am just an average citizen, even if I lecture an intelligence organization, nothing will change.

“This meeting is to remain private. You are not to leak this information to anyone. There’s also no need for you to pay for this information. Go, Dazai.”

I hurried Dazai and turned my heel towards the exit.

“Give your name as the ‘Fenimore Transportation’ at the reception next time. They will contact me. Starting from mere clues, your ability to reach up until this point is impressive. If the Agency ever fires you, give me a call. I would like to scout you as a secret service agent candidate.”

“So he says. What do we do, Kunikida-kun?”

“I have no plans to work in a profession that doesn’t make a single move even after hearing that a bomb was placed in Japan. Well, then.”

Without waiting for a reply, I walked out. The agent didn’t say a word.

For the sake of organizing the information documents, Dazai and I returned to the Agency.

The time left until the deadline at sunset is approximately two hours.

Until then, we have to catch the terrorist that is Aramta and make him spit out the location of the bombs. In just a mere two hours.

However, we have good news. There was a notice that help had arrived.

When I heard that news, I had confidence. We can remove the bombs.

“Ahahahahaha! You all are no good! Without me, the investigation can’t go on!”

The moment we returned to the Agency, the usual loud laughter can be heard.

“Ranpo-san! How was the case in Kyushu?”

“Ah, that. With just one look at the corpse, I could tell who the criminal was and how he did the crime, so I quickly solved it and came back.”

Nonchalantly sipping on his drink while answering is the senior detective, Edogawa Ranpo.

“Listen up, Kunikida. Just because of one bomb, everyone is in such an uproar. Having a hopeless kouhai is really troubling, you know? Thanks to that, I had to cancel my sightseeing plans in Kyushu and came right back. And I even wanted to eat a hot-spring egg.”

“I am sorry. But we need Ranpo-san’s power right now.”

“My power?”

“Yes.... By right, it should be a case we solve on our own.... But, we were unable to do so, and it even resulted in Ranpo-san’s aid. We are truly apologetic.”

After staring at me, Ranpo-san took a deep breath and said, “Well – it can’t be helped! It’s nothing to be ashamed of, Kunikida. It’s my bad for being so talented! My ‘Super Deduction’ is the best of the best of abilities, it can’t be helped if you’re dependent on it!”

While laughing loudly, he hit my shoulder repeatedly.

“It’s exactly like you said.” I nodded deeply.

“K-Kunikida-kun, are you okay? Can you endure it?”

From my side, Dazai said timidly.

Endure? What is Dazai saying? Isn’t everything as Ranpo-san said? (I ALWAYS THOUGHT KNKD WAS PUTTING UP AND ACT WHEN IT COMES TO RANPO BUT HE ISNT OMG HE OBEYS RANPO FROM WAY DEEEEEEEEP DOWN I CALL ON THIS RAREPAIR)

“Dazai, give Ranpo-san the documents.”

“Ah, yes. Hi, I am Dazai, the new recruit. Please take care of me.”

“Ahhh, yes I’ve heard. Please find lots of cases from now on. I will solve everything.”

While receiving the documents, Ranpo-san’s eyes casually landed on Dazai.

“New guy. Uh, was it Dazai?What was your previous job?”

“Yes?”

Ranpo-san became expressionless. He stared at Dazai. As if he’s looking for something.

"After I am done with school, I haven't done anything in particular and was just wandering around."

Even at Dazai's answer, Ranpo-san didn't say anything and keep on staring. After a few seconds, "I see. That's good. Well then, work hard." After he finished saying that, he lined the terrorist's documents up on the table as if nothing had happened.

What the hell was that?

"Oi Dazai, what was that just now?"

"I don't know, even though I was asked. –Anyway, that Ranpo-san, what kind of ability user is he?"

Oh right, I haven't explained to Dazai yet.

"Ranpo-san has an ability called 'Super Deduction'. It's an amazing ability where just by looking, he can see the truth behind cases."

"Such an ability exists!?"

Even someone like Dazai is surprised.

"Yes. He has many fans even among the police force and government clerks. Every time there is a case that is hard to solve, it always arrives to a request for Ranpo-san. He's an ability user that supports the Agency."

"Suddenly, it's so hard to believe in that kind of ability." said a half-believing, half-doubting Dazai.

"You'll understand when you see it."

"Kunikida! Is it okay if I just find where the bombs are using my 'Super Deduction'?"

"Yes. There is no more time. The location of the bomb takes top priority. If we know where it is, we can remove it."

"So it's okay if I don't have to find where this Aramta-kun guy is, right?"

"The bomb, before anything else."

"All right then! Ahaha, my bad, because I show up you people don't have active scenes anymore. Dazai, hand me those glasses over there."

He put on the black-framed glasses Dazai handed to him. The use of those glasses means the start of Ranpo-san's ability.

Ranpo-san narrowed his eyes.

His shining gaze pierced all of the universe, his thoughts surpassed the oracles of the gods.

–*Super Deduction.*

"..... I understand."

Ranpo-san mumbled while putting his glasses down.

“Eh, seriously?”

From behind Ranpo-san, Dazai gulped and with a very interested look, leaned forward.

“Map.”

Ranpo-san wagged his finger. I took a map of the Yokohama area and its surroundings from the bookshelf and spread it open on top of the table.

A weapon of destruction that can kill hundreds of people. The one who made it is a bomb merchant who is the disciple of the man who screams dread.

Just what – what kind of crazy place have that kind of person chosen to install the bomb at?

Train station, a large hospital, school. Or a skyscraper, the city hall, shopping mall. In the worst case scenario, it'll be somewhere unthinkable.

“The bomb is –”

Ranpo-san dropped his finger on top of the map. I gulped.

“Here. A fishing gear store.”

..... Huh?

A fishing gear store?

Did I hear wrongly? Or maybe it's some kind of important secret installation, or a store that handles dangerous goods?

“....I see. I get it.”

After a short while, Dazai muttered.

“Of course, Of course it is! Ranpo-san's ability is the real deal! Yep, other than this fishing gear store, anywhere else is impossible! Well, Kunikida-kun, hurry!”

“You must be awed by my greatness, right? New guy-kun.”

“Yes! Excellent, Ranpo-san is by no doubt, a matchless famous detective! It's the best, I am glad I joined the Agency! Let's go, what are you daydreaming for, Kunikida-kun, we can make it in time for sunset if we go now!”

“Oi.... Dazai, but...”

“I'll explain while we're on the move! Hurry up!”

“Good luck.”

Dazai pulled on my sleeve and I left the Agency, still confused.

We got on a car belonging to the Agency and headed for the fishing gear store. Due to the fact that the car will turn into a murder machine when driven by Dazai, I took the wheel.

“Explain, Dazai. What do you mean?” I asked Dazai who was sitting on the passenger seat while I am driving.

“I will explain, but first, Kunikida-kun, you don't doubt Ranpo-san's deduction, do you?”

“Yeah, if it's Ranpo-san's deduction then there is no room for doubt. The bomb is definitely in the fishing gear store. But what's your reason for believing?”

Ranpo-san's ability is the ability to see through the truth. There has never been a case where he missed. But what was it that made Dazai understand this?

“It's clear just by looking at the map.”

At Dazai's words, I recall it from my memories. Around the fishing gear store there were nothing other than roads, office buildings and small stores. Although I can't say that the damage will be small, but for something an international terrorist is aiming for, it is not that vicious.

"Stop testing me. I have a mountain of things to think about as it is. Tell me the conclusion."

"I thought about it after looking at the documents, but an international terrorist like Aramta has bombed many countries in large scales right? What's more, he won't bomb the same place twice. He picked tourist spots and high class hotels, army bases and post offices, skyscrapers and foundations of buildings. Well, what is he targeting this time?"

"Don't waste time, quickly say it."

"Aramta's target – are the oil storage tanks."

Realization crashed like a hammer hit my head.

Yokohama's – petroleum industrial complex!

I see. Why didn't I realize it before?

One of Japan's many harbor cities that is Yokohama is the most important area for shipping fossil fuels. There are lots of storage buildings for keeping petroleum and other natural gases lined up. To support the many companies in the Kanto area, these fuels are carried and kept in large quantities.

What more, around the industrial complex, there are chemical, metal and fuel processing factories that uses these raw fuels lined up and their products supports important industries all over Japan.

If a bomb exploded around the industrial complex, the storage tanks nearby will catch on fire. It is certain that the fire from the explosion will spread all throughout the harbor. At worst, it can't be put out for days, it'll be the worst industrial conflagration in the history of Japan. It is hard to put out fire caused by fossil fuels, the damage will last for a long time. While it will cause harm to humans, more than anything, the impact it will cause on the economy will be unmeasurable."

"I see. So the reason you admire Ranpo-san was because he guessed right?"

"Nope."

What?

"The thing that struck me with admiration was the originality of aiming for the storage tanks and not Ranpo-san's ability."

"Then what is it?"

"Fufufu. The thing that surprises me the most is that Ranpo-san's ability is not an ability."

–Huh?

"What did you say? Don't say dumb things, as if anyone can do something like that without an ability."

"That's why it's so impressive! Actually, when Ranpo-san was deducing, I sneakily reached to touch his hair."

"What?"

It's true that Dazai was standing behind Ranpo-san all that time. But since when –

"As you know, when I touch the other party, I can cancel out their abilities, I am an anti-ability user. As long as I touch a part of their body, no matter how much of a great ability user that person is, they won't be able to use their powers. In other words –"

Ranpo-san's 'Super Deduction' is not an ability?

“Then –“

“That’s all just simple deduction. Just by observing and deducing, an individual can come up with a theoretical conclusion in a mere second. A map of Yokohama, Aramta’s documents, and knowledge on arson. Linking the information at hand, he came up with a conclusion on the spot. As if he is a great detective from a novel – No, the best part is after the detective solved the crime. A mediocre great detective can’t even hope to beat the Ranpo-san that can solve a crime just by glancing at the documents without going to the place of the crime or meeting the criminal. His power of deduction should really be feared.”

Deduction?

Not because of an ability, but results of simple thinking?

“Is such a thing even possible? Just how –“

“The part that amazes me is that. If he’s an ability user, it’s simply a result of that. I won’t care or be surprised at all. But the thing that Ranpo-san has are results of a thought that anyone can do. Aramta disappeared from the US secret service’s watch two days ago. Which means, he won’t have the time to obtain a fake ID and pretend to be a factory worker, right? The easiest way is to rent a car, load the bombs in it and park near the storage tanks. If the bomb’s range is 200 meters, then it should be somewhere near the tanks under that distance. The place that fits that category in the harbor is –“

“The fishing gear store mentioned earlier?”

“Yes. Although it’s a place hard to be found. To be able to pick this place out just by glancing at the documents is a really impressive observation ability! Also, it seems like he was indeed planning to use an ability. What a great person. I have to devote to him.”

In the end, I understood Dazai’s admiration. Indeed, even if it is a god-like ability, it won’t pass as anything other than it being an ability. But if said person has such great deducing skills, then it’s another story. The cases Ranpo-san solved before are not just ten or twelve. In all the cases he had worked with before, with just a glance at the information, he’s able to instantly see the truth behind them, and not once did he get it wrong. God-like is not enough to describe him; it’s something out of this world.

A non-ability user that surpasses ability users. We can say that there are gods among us in this country, no, this world.

Even so –

I looked at Dazai who is sitting in the passenger seat.

“It’s the first time I see you so surprised at other people’s abilities.”

“Eh, really? I am surprised pretty often. While reaching with my chopsticks to eat a clam and realizing it’s still alive, what a shock –“

“Not that. I feel like you see through everything about a person.”

Although Dazai has that eccentric behavior on a daily basis, it feels like he has seen all kinds of worlds. I don’t know why that is, but it feels like he’s putting up a front and masking his emotions. Underneath that easygoing exterior, isn’t there something more than meets the eye?

“Indeed, I more or less understand about Kunikida-kun. I won’t be surprised anymore. It’s because Kunikida-kun is more naïve than they think.”

“What did you say!?”

“That reaction is also really honest. That’s good, and then after you’re going to secretly fret over, “Am I really naïve?” That’s also good.”

“You –“

What did I want to rebut with? No matter what I say, I feel like he’s going to reply with, “Just as I thought.” I don’t want that.

“Well then, I am going to show you that I can surprise you one of these days. I will break through your expectations.”

“I’ll be looking forward to that. If you manage to surprise me, then I’ll treat you lots, okay?”

“Deal. Don’t forget it.”

“I won’t forget. No matter which way the bet ends up, I am not at a disadvantage. Look, we can see the fishing gear store.”

I dropped the speed of the car, and stopped at an alley where the store was still in sight.

000